

Copyright
by
Charles Alexandre Mignot
2013

**The The Dissertation Committee for Charles Alexandre Mignot Certifies that this is
the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**THE SEMANTIC IMPORT OF THE FRENCH PREPOSITION À
‘AT/TO’ IN VERBAL ARGUMENT ALTERNATIONS**

Committee:

Cinzia Russi, Supervisor

Catherine Léger, Co-Supervisor

Michel Achard

John Beavers

Bryan Donaldson

Jean-Pierre Montreuil

**THE SEMANTIC IMPORT OF THE FRENCH PREPOSITION À
'AT/TO' IN VERBAL ARGUMENT ALTERNATIONS**

by

Charles ALlexandre Mignot, BA, MA

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my two co-supervisors, Catherine Léger and Cinzia Russi. Catherine Léger has been an extraordinary mentor—her hard work, intellectual rigor, patience and kindness have set a high standard, which I aspire to follow during my academic career. From the beginning, when this dissertation was only a blurry idea, to the very end, when the final revisions were necessary, Catherine Léger provided infallible guidance and support throughout the entire process. I cannot thank her enough for her dedication and the countless hours she has spent giving me precious directions about my research and helping me improve my analyses and style. I would like to equally thank Cinzia Russi, who has provided me with very thorough comments and feedback and helped me broaden my theoretical knowledge, thus deepening my analytical skills. I would like to thank them both for their advice, which played a decisive role in the quality of my research, correcting so many typographic errors and, as a way to honor them, I will do my best to get rid of this very bad habit in the future. May the reader find any typos, I claim full responsibility.

I am equally very grateful to the committee members of my dissertation. I would like to thank Michel Achard and John Beavers (and his wife) for their very insightful comments that helped me better shape this dissertation and gave me invaluable guidance for my future research, and whose work has been an inspiration throughout the writing of my dissertation. I would also like to thank Bryan Donaldson and Jean-Pierre Montreuil for their equally insightful comments and their useful guidance in the academic world. I would like to thank the Department of French and Italian and the Graduate School at the University of Texas for their financial support, the past and present chair of our Department, Daniela Bini and David Birdsong, the faculty members, in particular, Carl Blyth, Barbara Bullock, Nancy Guilloteau, Michael Johnson, Karen Kelton, Hervé Picherit, Alexandra Wettlaufer, and the staff, Christine Bryce, Susan Floyd, Victor Martinez and Chaz Nailor.

Thanks to all of my friends, especially to Christian Aviles, Clare Perry, Corinne Griffin/Le Bihan and Cécile Rey, for their unconditional love and support throughout the writing of my dissertation, to Rhett Morgan, Nicholas Bacuez, Nicole Barnes, Jason Brazeal, Amanda Dalola, Charlotte Détrie, Cécile Fandos, Yazz Fawaz, Karen Francisco, Laura Goudet, Cyril Grima, Anna Krusanova, Olivier Le Bihan, Elliott Le Bihan, Meredith Lehman, Mary Ellen Loper Hughes, Clémence Ozel, Matthieu Ploteau, Michael Pocquet, Hélène Poirrier, Aude Rivollet, Emma van Rossum, Hugo Vila, Jason Wohlfahrt and Stéphane Andraud, *in memoria*, for their support throughout my PhD years, and Libby Mallonee Gertken, Tristan Nguyen, Beki Post and Anna Troyansky for their moral support at my defense.

My thanks also go to my family, especially, to my parents, who, despite still having trouble understanding how I could be an entitled doctor for doing some research on *à* ‘at/to’, have shown me great support, to my grandmother, to my siblings, Pierre-Arnaud, Vadim and Mélanie, my aunt and uncle, Liliane and Marc, to my cousins, Céline, Catherine and Marlène, and to my grandfather, *in memoria*.

I am also very grateful to another dissertation supervisor, Nicolas Ballier, whose tremendous guidance and support, whose insightful linguistic analyses and theoretical views have largely contributed to the outcome of this dissertation, and without whom the United-States of America would have certainly been a mere touristic destination.

Finally, I would like to thank a teacher, Monsieur Adem, who made me fall in love with teaching and the beauty of the French language.

THE SEMANTIC IMPORT OF THE FRENCH PREPOSITION À 'AT/TO' IN VERBAL ARGUMENT ALTERNATIONS

Charles Alexandre Mignot, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Co-supervisors: Catherine Léger, Cinzia Russi

This study examines the semantic import of the French preposition *à* 'at/to' in argument alternations. In French, some verbs can be followed by a direct object or by an indirect object introduced by the preposition *à* 'at/to' (e.g., *parer/parer à* 'to ward off/to guard against', *satisfaire/satisfaire à* 'to satisfy', *toucher/toucher à* 'to touch', etc.). Although the preposition *à* 'at/to' has been characterized in the literature as a meaningless grammatical element, and more specifically so in cases of argument alternations, this study shows that *à* 'at/to' is meaningful and that it contributes to the semantics of the indirect transitive constructions of the verbs under scrutiny. Couched in the Cognitive Grammar theoretical framework (Langacker 1987b, 1991), this study is based on the assumption that grammar is meaningful and that the meaning of grammatical items is more abstract than the meaning of lexical items. Consequently, two abstract meanings characterizing *à* 'at/to' are proposed to account for the semantic differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verbs analyzed in this study: the expression of an abstract goal and the expression of an abstract localization. For some verbs, the indirect transitive construction entails a notion of goal that is not expressed in the direct transitive construction. For other verbs, *à* 'at/to' expresses an abstract relation (i.e., an abstract localization) between the lexical semantics of the verb and the indirect object, which results in meaning differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions based on the notion of affectedness. Following Langacker (1987a), I view transitivity as a transfer of energy and propose that the various levels of energy involved in an event correlate with the various levels of affectedness of the object. I argue that *à* 'at/to' signals a disruption of energy leading to a lower affectedness of the indirect object than that of the direct object (see also Beavers 2011). Finally, I show that, for the verb *toucher* 'to touch', the semantic import of *à* 'at/to' varies in relation to the various senses of the indirect transitive construction of the verb.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures	xiv
List of Symbols and Abbreviations	xvi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Assumptions	11
2.1. Cognitive Grammar	12
2.1.1. Theoretical assumptions	12
2.1.2. Conceptualization of actions and events	17
2.2. Argument realization	21
2.2.1. Lexical semantic representations	21
2.2.2. Argument alternations	25
2.2.3. Affectedness and transitivity	27
2.3. The semantics of prepositions	30
2.3.1. Approaches to the semantic representations of prepositions	30
2.3.2. Polysemy	32
2.3.3. Principled polysemy	35
2.4. Summary	38
Chapter 3: The Preposition <i>à</i> ‘at/to’	40
3.1. Syntactic aspects	40
3.1.1. Syntactic and morphosyntactic properties.....	41
3.1.2. Properties of prepositional phrases in verbal contexts	45
3.2. Diachronic aspects.....	53
3.2.1. Grammaticalization	53
3.2.2. Grammaticalization of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’	57
3.2.3. Grammaticalization and prototype-based polysemic networks	67
3.3. Semantic aspects	70

3.3.1. On the meaning of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’	70
3.3.2. The meaning of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts	74
3.4. Summary	78
Chapter 4: <i>À</i> ‘at/to’ and the Expression of Goal in Argument Alternations	80
4.1. Theoretical assumptions	81
4.1.1. <i>À</i> ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal	81
4.1.2. On the interaction between grammatical and lexical meanings.....	84
4.2. <i>Aspirer</i> ‘to breathe in/to aspire’	88
4.2.1. Semantic characterization	88
4.2.2. Corpus analysis	91
4.2.3. Semantic analysis	94
4.3. <i>Parer</i> ‘to ward off/to guard against’	97
4.3.1. Semantic characterization	97
4.3.2. Corpus analysis	99
4.3.3. Semantic analysis	101
4.4. <i>Voir</i> ‘to see/to see to’ and <i>regarder</i> ‘to look at/to pay attention to’	104
4.4.1. Semantic characterization	104
4.4.2. Corpus analysis	107
4.4.3. Semantic analysis	109
4.5. <i>Veiller</i> ‘to watch (over)’ and <i>travailler</i> ‘to work’	111
4.5.1. Semantic characterization	111
4.5.2. Corpus analysis	117
4.5.3. Semantic analysis	120
4.6. Pro-eventive verb class.....	122
4.6.1. Definition and properties.....	122
4.6.2. Argument alternations of pro-eventive verbs.....	130
4.6.3. On the valence of pro-eventive verbs.....	136
4.7. <i>Viser</i> ‘to aim’	140
4.7.1. Semantic characterization	140

4.7.2. Corpus analysis	144
4.7.3. Semantic analysis	146
4.8. Summary	146
Chapter 5: À ‘at/to’ and the Expression of Localization in Argument	
Alternations	149
5.1. Theoretical assumptions	150
5.1.1. Abstract localization.....	150
5.1.2. Direct and indirect transitivity.....	154
5.2. Verb alternations and localization.....	161
5.2.1. <i>Réussir</i> ‘to succeed’	162
5.2.2. <i>Habiter</i> ‘to live/to inhabit’	165
5.3. Argument alternations and change of meaning.....	173
5.3.1. Lexical specification	174
5.3.2. Metaphorization	176
5.4. <i>Applaudir</i> ‘to applaud’	181
5.4.1. Semantic characterization	181
5.4.2. Corpus analysis	186
5.4.3. Semantic analysis	187
5.5. <i>Contredire</i> ‘to contradict’	191
5.5.1. Semantic characterization	191
5.5.2. Corpus analysis	194
5.5.3. Semantic analysis	196
5.6. <i>Insulter</i> ‘to insult’	199
5.6.1. Semantic characterization	199
5.6.2. Corpus analysis	201
5.6.3. Semantic analysis	203
5.7. <i>Satisfaire</i> ‘to satisfy’	207
5.7.1. Semantic characterization	207
5.7.2. Corpus analysis	209
5.7.3. Semantic analysis	211

5.8. Summary	213
Chapter 6: The Polysemy of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ in the Argument Alternations of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	216
6.1. Semantic characterization	216
6.1.1. Polysemy of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	216
6.1.2. Argument alternations of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	223
6.2. Previous accounts	228
6.2.1. Picoche (1986).....	228
6.2.2. Vandeloise (1993, 1996)	232
6.2.3. Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995)	238
6.2.4. Shortcomings of previous accounts.....	239
6.3. Semantic analysis	242
6.3.1. The senses of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	243
6.3.1.1. Static usages	243
6.3.1.2. Kinetic usages that entail a minimal transfer of energy	246
6.3.1.3. Kinetic usages that entail a transfer of energy	249
6.3.2. Senses of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	253
6.3.2.1. Static usages	253
6.3.2.2. Kinetic usages that entail an abstract contact	255
6.3.2.3. Kinetic usages that entail an abstract goal	258
6.3.2.4. Kinetic usages that entail proximity	263
6.3.3. The semantic import of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	265
6.4. Summary	268
Chapter 7: Conclusion	269
References	280

List of Tables

Table 1.1: List of the verbs studied	4
Table 2.1: Categorization of archetypal roles (based on Figure 9, Langacker 1987a: 30).....	19
Table 3.1: Pronominal properties of IOà (based on (2.27), Herslund 1988: 48)	50
Table 4.1: Complementation types of <i>aspirer à</i> ‘to aspire’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	92
Table 4.2: Complementation types of <i>parer à</i> ‘to guard against’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	100
Table 4.3: Complementation types of <i>parer</i> ‘to ward off’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	100
Table 4.4: Complementation types of <i>voir à</i> ‘to see to’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	108
Table 4.5: Complementation types of <i>regarder à</i> ‘to pay attention to’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	109
Table 4.6: Complementation types of <i>veiller à</i> ‘to watch (over)’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	118
Table 4.7: Complementation types of <i>veiller sur</i> ‘to watch (over)’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	118
Table 4.8: Complementation types of <i>travailler à</i> ‘to work’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	119
Table 4.9: Complementation types of <i>travailler sur</i> ‘to work’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century).....	119

Table 4.10: Complementation types of <i>aider à</i> ‘to help’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/ 20 th century)	137
Table 4.11: Types of constructions with <i>aider à</i> ‘to help’ followed by nominal phrases (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	137
Table 4.12: Complementation types of <i>viser à</i> ‘to aim at’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	144
Table 4.13: Nominal complementation types of the direct and indirect constructions of <i>viser</i> ‘to aim’ (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	145
Table 5.1: Occurrences of <i>applaudir</i> ‘to applaud’ by construction type (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	187
Table 5.2: Occurrences of <i>contredire</i> ‘to contradict’ by construction type (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	195
Table 5.3: Occurrences of <i>insulter</i> ‘to insult’ by construction type (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	202
Table 5.4: Occurrences of <i>satisfaire</i> ‘to satisfy’ by construction type (<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	210
Table 5.5: Occurrences of some nouns as direct or indirect objects of <i>satisfaire</i> ‘to satisfy’(<i>ARTFL</i> corpus/20 th century)	211
Table 6.1: Senses of the static usages of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	244
Table 6.2: Senses of the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that involve a minimal transfer of energy	247
Table 6.3: Senses of the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that entail a transfer of energy	250

Table 6.4: Senses of the static usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	254
Table 6.5: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that entail an abstract contact	256
Table 6.6: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that entail an abstract goal	259
Table 6.7: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that entail proximity	264
Table 7.1: Evolution of the types of constructions with <i>postuler</i> ‘to apply for’ .	278

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Schema for <i>Peter admires Mary</i> (based on Figure 7.18, Langacker 2008: 211)	16
Figure 3.1: Grammaticalization of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ (based on Kilroe 1987: 249)	57
Figure 3.2: Schematization of the notion of APPROXIMATION	62
Figure 3.3: Schematization of the notion of DIRECTION	62
Figure 3.4: Schematization of the notion of POSITION	63
Figure 3.5: Schematization of the notion of GOAL	65
Figure 4.1: Schematic representation of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal	82
Figure 4.2: Grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum	88
Figure 4.3: Schematization of <i>à la paix</i> ‘to the peace’ in (7)	95
Figure 4.4: Schematization of <i>aspirer à</i> ‘to aspire’	96
Figure 4.5: Schema of the lexical meaning of <i>parer</i> ‘to ward off’	102
Figure 4.6: Schema of <i>parer à</i> ‘to guard against’	103
Figure 4.7: Schematization of <i>voir à</i> ‘to see to’ and <i>regarder à</i> ‘to pay attention to’	111
Figure 4.8: Schematization of <i>veiller à</i> ‘to watch (over)’ and <i>travailler à</i> ‘to work’	121
Figure 4.9: Schematization of pro-eventive verbs with potential omission of V_{inf}	128
Figure 4.10: Schematization of pro-eventive verbs without potential omission of V_{inf}	129
Figure 4.11: Schematization of the notion of target	142

Figure 5.1: Schema of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ as a general localizer	152
Figure 5.2: Schema of <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer	153
Figure 5.3: Schematization of a direct transitive construction (based on Figure 11.2, in Langacker 2008: 374)	160
Figure 5.4: Schematization of the indirect transitive construction with <i>à</i> ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer	161
Figure 5.5: Schematization of the direct transitive construction of <i>habiter</i> ‘to live/to inhabit’	171
Figure 5.6: Schematization of the indirect transitive construction of <i>habiter</i> ‘to live/to inhabit’ with <i>dans</i> ‘in’	172
Figure 6.1: Schema of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ with no transfer of energy	246
Figure 6.2: Schema of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ with a minimal transmission of energy	249
Figure 6.3: Schema of the direct transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ with a transmission of energy	253
Figure 6.4: Schema of the static usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’	255
Figure 6.5: Schema of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ that entail an abstract contact	258
Figure 6.6: Schema of the indirect transitive construction of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ entailing an abstract goal	263
Figure 6.7: Schema for the usages of <i>toucher</i> ‘to touch’ entailing proximity	265

List of Symbols and Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
AFF	Affectedness
ARTFL	<i>American and French Research for the Treasury of French Language</i>
DAT	Dative
G	Grounding
INST	Instigating
IOà	Indirect object(s) introduced by à ‘at/to’
Lm	Landmark
NP	Nominal phrase(s)
O	Object
O à V _{inf}	Object à ‘at/to’ infinitive verb
<i>t</i>	Time
TLFi	<i>Trésor de la langue française informatisé</i>
Tr	Trajector
V _{inf}	Infinitive verb
VOL	Volitionality

Chapter 1: Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is to analyze the role of the French preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in the meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of verbs showing argument alternations in modern French (e.g., *parer/parer à* ‘to ward off/to guard against’, *satisfaire/satisfaire à* ‘to satisfy’, *toucher/toucher à* ‘to touch’, etc.).

Suggesting that a preposition subcategorized by a verb contributes to the meaning of a construction is certainly not uncontroversial as there appears to be a general consensus in the literature on the distinction between two main types of prepositions: lexical (or meaningful) prepositions and functional (or meaningless) prepositions (Fillmore 1968; Fries 1991; Hestvik 1991; Pollard & Sag 1994; Rauh 1993; Rooryck 1996; Spang-Hanssen 1963; Vendryes 1921; Zribi-Hertz 1984). In the context of argument realization, *à* ‘at/to’ has indeed been characterized as belonging to the functional class (Gabriel 2003). Recent studies, however, suggest that this binary classification should be revised (Littlefield 2006) and that the lexical/functional dichotomy should be viewed as two opposite poles of a spectrum used to categorize prepositions at various levels (Tseng 2000). The questioning of a dichotomous approach used to classify prepositions echoes a more general view of language, which challenges the characterization of syntax as an autonomous component of language (Chomsky 1968), one in which lexicon and grammar are viewed as a continuum, from the more

concrete lexical pole to the more abstract grammatical one (Croft 2001; Goldberg 1995; Langacker 1987b, 1991).

In this study, formalized in the framework of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987b, 1991, 2008), I argue not only that the so-called meaningless preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in the context of argument realization has semantic content, but also that the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ plays a major role in the meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of a given verb, as illustrated in (1) and (2):

- (1) a. *Il a touché sa jambe.*
he has touched her leg
‘He touched her leg.’
- b. *Il a touché à sa jambe.*
he has touched at/to her leg
‘He touched her leg.’
- (2) a. *Il a touché sa jambe par mégarde.*
he has touched her leg by inadvertence
‘He touched her leg inadvertently.’
- b. *?Il a touché à sa jambe par mégarde.*
he has touched at/to her leg by inadvertence
‘He touched her leg inadvertently.’

The data given in (1) show that the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ can either have a direct transitive construction, that is, can be followed by a direct object, *sa jambe* ‘her leg’ in (1a), or an indirect one, that is, can be followed by an indirect object, *à sa jambe* ‘at/to her leg’ in (1b). Although the argument alternation displayed in (1) could be considered, at first glance, as a case of pure alternation (see Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005), that is, a case of alternation for which no obvious semantic difference can be discerned, the examples provided in (2) show that there is a semantic contrast between the direct and

indirect transitive constructions. The low acceptability of (2b), in contrast to (2a), can be viewed as resulting from the incompatibility between the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ that implies intentionality on the part of the subject (see Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer 1995; Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996) and the meaning of the adverbial *par mégarde* ‘inadvertently’ (see sections 3.3.2 and 6.2.3).

The semantic import of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations have often been studied for a restricted set of verbs, such as in the case of the alternation *toucher/toucher à* ‘to touch’ (Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer 1995; Gougenheim 1959; Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996; Vandeloise 1993). The present study provides a more systematic, comprehensive and thorough analysis of the semantic contribution of *à* ‘at/to’ in constructions of the French verbs showing direct/indirect argument alternations. Demonstrating that the semantic differences observed in these cases of alternations can systematically be accounted for in relation to the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ could thus question the argument put forth by Cervoni (1991: 129) according to which the \emptyset/\bar{a} alternation in verbal contexts reinforces the impression of semantic emptiness usually attributed to *à* ‘at/to’. As I will argue in this study, the use of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations is not idiosyncratic. On the one hand, there appears to be a semantic affinity between the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ and that of verbs that select the preposition (see Marque-Pucheu 2008). On the other hand, the use of *à* ‘at/to’ contributes to the overall meaning of the construction.

The list of verbs under scrutiny in this study is given in alphabetical order in Table 1.1, along with the numbers of the chapters and sections in which they are examined:

VERBS	#	VERBS	#
<i>aider/aider à</i> 'to help'	4.6	<i>insulter/insulter à</i> 'to insult'	5.6
<i>applaudir/applaudir à</i> 'to applaud'	5.4	<i>obliger/obliger à</i> 'to compel'	4.6
<i>aspirer/aspirer à</i> 'to breathe in/to aspire'	4.2	<i>parer/parer à</i> 'to ward off/to guard against'	4.3
<i>assister/assister à</i> 'to assist/to attend'	5.3.1	<i>pousser/pousser à</i> 'to push/to urge'	4.6
<i>atteindre/atteindre à</i> 'to reach'	7	<i>postuler/postuler à</i> 'to apply for'	7
<i>autoriser/autoriser à</i> 'to authorize'	4.6	<i>regarder/regarder à</i> 'to look at/to pay attention to'	4.4
<i>conduire/conduire à</i> 'to drive/to lead to'	4.6	<i>satisfaire/satisfaire à</i> 'to satisfy'	5.7
<i>contredire/contredire à</i> 'to contradict'	5.5	<i>souscrire/souscrire à</i> 'to subscribe'	5.3.2
<i>encourager/encourager à</i> 'to encourage'	4.6	<i>tenir/tenir à</i> 'to hold'	5.3.2
<i>entraîner/entraîner à</i> 'to train/to lead to'	4.6	<i>toucher/toucher à</i> 'to touch'	6
<i>forcer/forcer à</i> 'to force'	4.6	<i>travailler/travailler à</i> 'to work'	4.5
<i>goûter/goûter à</i> 'to taste'	7	<i>veiller/veiller à</i> 'to watch (over)'	4.5
<i>incliner/incliner à</i> 'to incline/to prompt'	4.6	<i>viser/viser à</i> 'to aim'	4.7
<i>initier/initier à</i> 'to initiate'	4.6	<i>voir/voir à</i> 'to see/to see to'	4.4

Table 1.1: List of the verbs studied

The verbs listed in Table 1.1 can be classified in relation to the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive constructions. I do not assume that the semantic contribution of *à* ‘at/to’ in the differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of these verbs is uniform; I demonstrate that it varies from verb to verb. For the verbs studied in Chapter 4, the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized in terms of abstract goal, in the sense that the indirect transitive construction entails the notion of goal in a less specific and more abstract fashion than other prepositions do in French (e.g., *pour* ‘for/to’). For the verbs analyzed in Chapter 5, I characterize the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract localization, which can be roughly glossed as “in relation to”. In the case of *toucher* ‘to touch’, studied in Chapter 6, I demonstrate that the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ varies in relation to the different senses of the indirect transitive constructions of the verb. I also provide a brief analysis of the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ for a few verbs in Chapter 7, which I relate to some of the analyses of the verbs studied in previous chapters.

As the goal of this study is mainly to show and analyze the semantic contribution of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations, I have only selected some of the verbs that best illustrate my purpose. The list of verbs provided in Table 1.1 is consequently not exhaustive as it does not include all the French verbs that display $\emptyset/\textit{à}$ alternations. The selection of these verbs is based on previous studies on the topic of argument alternations (Blinkenberg 1960; Gougenheim 1959, *inter alia*), on works establishing classifications of verbs (Dubois & Dubois-Charlier 1997; Gross 1969; Lasserre 1936), on French grammars (e.g., *Le Bon Usage* (electronic version) by Grevisse

and Goosse) and on dictionaries, notably, *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (TLFi). Blinkenberg (1960) offers a study of transitivity in French, in which cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations are often mentioned. In his study of *à* ‘at/to’ and *de* ‘of/from’, Gougenheim (1959) provides a short list of verbs exhibiting \emptyset /*à* alternations. Gross (1969) classifies French verbs in relation to their complementation patterns. Similarly, Dubois & Dubois-Charlier (1997) provide a comprehensive semantic and morphosyntactic classification of French verbs. Finally, Lasserre (1936) offers a list of all the verbs and expressions that are followed by *à* ‘at/to’ or *de* ‘of/from’ in French.

In order to contextualize some of the constructions I analyze, I have also had recourse to the *American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language* (ARTFL) corpus, a collection of about 2,900 digitalized French texts dating from the 12th to the 20th century¹. I have also used the ARTFL corpus to quantify the occurrences of some of the verbs and their complementation patterns. The complementation patterns examined are of three main categories: nominal phrases, infinitival phrases and finite-tensed clauses. I have subcategorized the nominal phrases (including pronouns) into animate phrases, inanimate concrete phrases, that is, phrases that refer to a concrete physical object in the extra-linguistic, and inanimate abstract phrases, that is, phrases referring to ideas or concepts (e.g., *liberté* ‘freedom’) or nominalized actions (e.g., *libération* ‘liberation’). In a few cases, I also had recourse to *Google Books*, which offers a collection of millions of published books.

¹ Note that I have restricted my search for data in the ARTFL corpus to the 20th century, since this study is

Although most of the data I analyze in the subsequent chapters are my own creation, I have taken into consideration the fact that Cognitive Grammar is a usage-based theory, that is, a theory for which the basic linguistic unit is a usage event (Langacker 2008). A usage event refers to “an actual instance of language use” (Langacker 2008: 220) and thus encapsulates the contextual import of an utterance or expression at all levels, that is, “physical, mental, social, cultural, emotive and evaluative” (Langacker 2008: 220).

In Chapter 2, I further present the theoretical assumptions of this study. I summarize the basic tenets of Cognitive Grammar as defined by Langacker (1987b, 1991, 2008) and underline the cognitive aspects of the theoretical framework. One of the most significant assumptions that Langacker (1987b, 1991, 2008) posits about language is that grammar is meaningful. He suggests a continuum to represent meaning, ranging from the highly specific meaning (i.e., lexical meaning) to the highly schematic meaning (i.e., grammatical meaning). In order to account for the representation of the verbal constructions under scrutiny in this study, I focus on Langacker’s (1987a) representation of actions and events. Langacker (1987a) views transitivity as a transfer of energy from a source (i.e., the subject) to a recipient (i.e., the object) and describes the semantic relations between the verb and its arguments in terms of archetypal roles. After showing the limits of archetypal roles with regards to the literature on argument realization, I propose to elaborate a representation model for transitivity in which the notion of affectedness is crucial. In order to justify my semantic representations of the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations, I review the various approaches to the semantic

representations of prepositions found in the literature and present the model suggested by Tyler & Evans (2003), that is, principled polysemy, on which my semantic representations of *à* ‘at/to’ are mainly based.

In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the syntactic and semantic properties of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. After reviewing the numerous syntactic uses of the preposition and the syntactic properties of prepositional phrases introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ as verb arguments, I enumerate the main senses of the preposition and show how they are diachronically related. To that end, after defining the theory of grammaticalization, I provide a brief summary of Kilroe’s (1987) study on the grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’ and discuss the similarities between the theory of grammaticalization and the synchronic polysemic network theories in order to justify the choices I make for my semantic representations. I finally review the literature dealing with the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ and show that the abstract core meaning suggested for *à* ‘at/to’ in the literature cannot be applied to all contexts.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the argument alternations in which the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized as the expression of an abstract goal. I claim that the interactions between the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ and the lexical semantics of the verb can be represented as a continuum. On the one hand, for some alternations, the meaning of the preposition is more or less incorporated into the lexical semantics of the verb. On the other hand, the lexical semantics of the verb more or less motivates the use of the preposition. I systematically demonstrate that the semantic differences observed between

the direct and indirect constructions of the verbs under scrutiny in the chapter can be related to the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal.

In Chapter 5, I focus on a set of verbs for which the semantic contribution of *à* ‘at/to’ can be defined as the expression of an abstract localization, characterizing the indirect object as an abstract reference point. The meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect constructions of the verbs under examination in this chapter are related to the affectedness of the objects. In order to account for the role of affectedness in the meaning differences, I posit that the concept of transfer of energy proposed by Langacker (1987a) to represent transitivity is scalar and that the various levels of energy entailed by a verb correlate with the various levels of affectedness of the object suggested by Beavers (2010, 2011). I claim that both the notions of energy and affectedness can be specifically defined in relation to the lexical semantics of each verb and that, in the case of the argument alternations under scrutiny in the chapter, the semantic entailment of affectedness defined for a given verb is present in the direct transitive construction of this verb but absent from the indirect one. I argue that, with these verbs, *à* ‘a/to’ signals a disruption in the transfer of energy, which can account for the different levels of affectedness observed between the direct and indirect constructions.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the semantic import of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’. After presenting the various senses of the direct and indirect constructions of this verb, I demonstrate that the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ with this verb is not homogeneous but varies in relation to the various senses of the indirect transitive constructions. Despite the plurality of senses that can be

assigned to *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of this verb, I systematically show that the semantic differences observed between the direct and indirect constructions of the verb can be related to the various senses of *à* ‘at/to’ I define in this chapter.

In Chapter 7, I provide the main conclusions of this study and show that the analyses offered for the set of verbs under scrutiny in this study can be extended to examples of other verbs showing argument alternations. I also discuss the limits of my analyses and the aspects of this study that need further investigation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Assumptions

Studying the semantic import of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations requires discussing not only the semantic representations of prepositions, but also the core theoretical assumptions related to the area of linguistics that pertain to argument realization, that is, “the study of the possible syntactic expressions of the arguments of a verb” (Levin & Rappaport Hova 2005: 1). As the study of argument realization deals with phenomena at the syntax/semantics interface, two radically opposite views of the relationships between syntax and semantics should be addressed. On the one hand, one may assume that syntax and semantics are totally autonomous (Chomsky 1957), and, on the other hand, one may consider that syntax and semantics are interrelated and that syntax is meaningful (Croft 2001; Goldberg 1995; Langacker 1987b, *inter alia*). As, in this study, I assume that syntax and semantics are interrelated and provide evidence that the semantic differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions can result from the meaning of the constructions, I provide a description of the theoretical foundations supporting my assumption in this chapter.

In section 2.1, I summarize the basic tenets of the Cognitive Grammar framework, as defined by Langacker (1987b, 1991, 2008), which assumes that syntax is meaningful. In section 2.2, I discuss some of the theoretical limits of Cognitive Grammar with regards to current research in the area of argument realization. In section 2.3, I review some of the approaches to the semantic representations of prepositions, focusing on the one

advocated in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. In section 2.4, I summarize the most significant aspects of this chapter.

2.1. COGNITIVE GRAMMAR

In this section, I first discuss some of the main theoretical assumptions underlying the Cognitive Grammar framework (section 2.1.1) and I then focus on an aspect of the theory that is particularly relevant to the present study, that is, the conceptualization of actions and events (section 2.1.2).

2.1.1. Theoretical assumptions

One of the fundamental assumptions of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987b) is that language is not modular, that is, is not an autonomous part of the mind, but rather an integral part of cognition. The cognitive dimension of language is indeed reflected in several cognitive processes associated to language, such as association, automatization, schematization and categorization. The process of association is, for instance, illustrated in the pairing of a phonological form with a meaning. The phenomenon of automatization is observed in the progressive entrenchment of a structure that eventually becomes a unit. For instance, in terms of language acquisition, the plural morpheme *-s* in English is an example of a unit resulting from the entrenchment of its use as a plural marker, which is subsequently carried out more or less automatically. The process of schematization involves the extraction of commonalities from multiple experiences and is found in the acquisition of lexical units. For example, the basic sense of the word *pen*, roughly, ‘an

instrument with which one can write', is schematic in relation to the diversity of pens that may exist; a single word, however, is more easily acquirable than would be a different word for every pen that may exist. The process of categorization entails that some elements are perceived as equivalent for some purpose. Grammatical categories are a basic example of categorization applied to language. In English, for instance, the definite and indefinite articles are used to introduce nominal phrases and, for that purpose, are seen as equivalent and are categorized as determiners. They are not employed for other purposes than the one defined by their grammatical category and would not, for example, be utilized as verbs.

Another fundamental assumption of Cognitive Grammar is that grammar is seen as symbolic assemblies. In other words, grammar is meaningful. These symbolic assemblies vary in terms of complexity, specificity/schematicity and conventionality, that is, the extent of their entrenchment in the language. The key parameter in the understanding of this assumption that grammar is meaningful is the one of the specificity/schematicity of the symbolic assemblies. Langacker (2008: 22) does not draw a clear-cut line between lexicon and grammar and notes that, in some cases, for instance, modals (i.e., *can*, *may*, *will*, etc.), there is no real consensus among linguists as to categorize these elements as either "lexical" or "grammatical". He argues that the specificity/schematicity parameter can be used to draw a distinction between the elements that are lexical and those that are grammatical. He claims that the meaning of lexical items tends to be more specific and less schematic (i.e., *dog*) and, conversely, that the meaning of grammatical items tends to be less specific and more schematic (i.e., a pattern

for relative clauses). One can assume a continuum between lexical meaning (i.e., a highly specific meaning) and grammatical meaning (i.e., a highly schematic meaning). Between the two poles of this continuum lie undetermined cases, that is, cases for which the meaning is more or less specific/more or less abstract, such as for modals.

In Cognitive Grammar, the meaning of the symbolic assemblies is not restricted to the conceptual content they evoke; it also includes the way the content is construed. The concept of construal is indeed a major part of the theory and encapsulates the phenomena related to specificity, prominence and perspective. The role of specificity in the construal of an event is illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. John stole an apple.
- b. Someone stole something.

The event of John's stealing an apple can be construed in a specific (1a) or in a less specific fashion (1b).

The various ways of construing an event also depend on the concept of prominence. Two main types of prominence play an important role in grammar: profiling and Trajector/Landmark alignment, respectively illustrated in (2) and (3):

- (2) a. Peter trains Mary.
 - b. Peter is a trainer.
 - c. Mary is a trainee.
-
- (3) a. Peter's office is above Mary's office.
 - b. Mary's office is below Peter's office.

The process of profiling involves giving prominence to a subpart of a conceptual base. In (2a), the event denotes a relationship that serves as a conceptual base for (2b) and (2c). In these two sentences, only one subpart of the relationship is profiled. The contrast between

(3a) and (3b) illustrates variants of the Trajector/Landmark alignment. Langacker (2008) defines the Trajector (Tr) as “the element being located, evaluated or described” (2008: 70), that is, the primary focal participant. In contrast, he defines the Landmark (Lm) as the secondary focal participant. Although (3a) and (3b) describe the same event, their difference lies in the Trajector/Landmark alignment. The primary focal participant is *Peter’s office* in (3a) and *Mary’s office* in (3b).

The concept of perspective is also an essential dimension of event construal, as illustrated in (4):

- (4) a. I will get married in 2014.
b. I will get married next year.

While the temporal reference in (4a), *in 2014*, is given in absolute terms, the one in (4b), *next year*, is construed in relation to the speaker’s vantage point, more specifically, in relation to the time of utterance.

Viewing grammar as consisting of symbolic assemblies, Langacker considers that “the objective of grammatical analysis is to describe such assemblies in clear and precise details” (2008: 161). He posits that constructions are symbolic assemblies (2008: 161) and that constructions can be viewed as composite structures into which component structures are integrated (2008: 162). Consider the following example:

- (5) Peter admires Mary.

The construction illustrated in (5) is a composite structure resulting from the integration of three component structures: the noun *Peter*, the noun *Mary* and the verb *admires*.

Langacker The composition of this construction is represented in Figure 2.1:

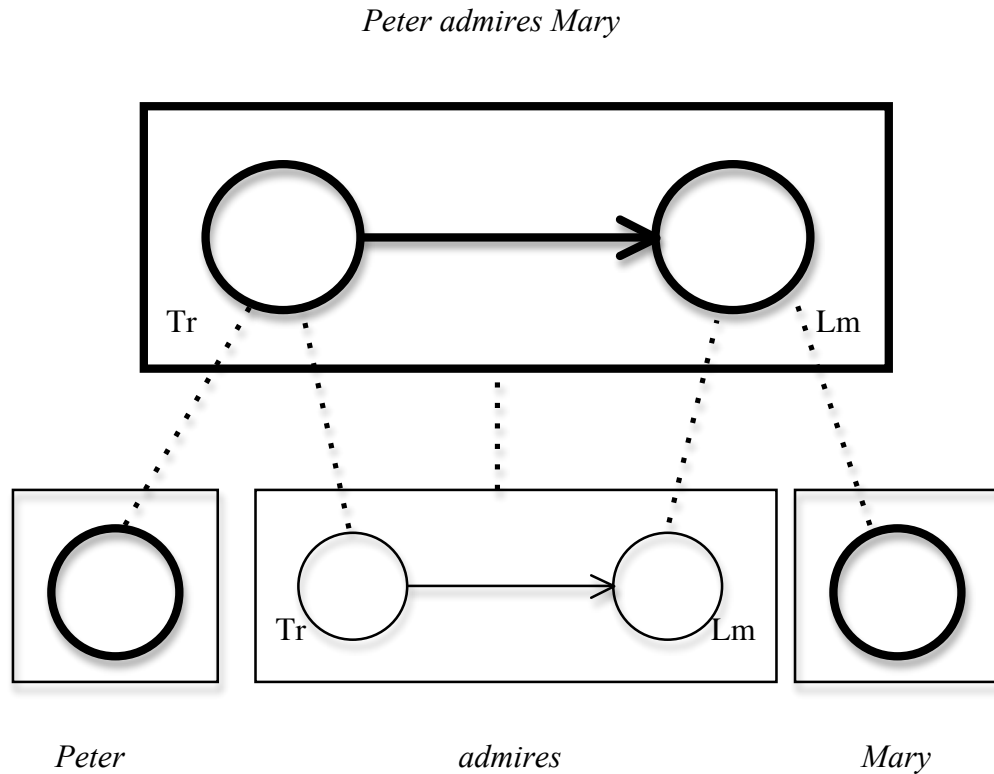


Figure 2.1: Schema for *Peter admires Mary* (based on Figure 7.18, Langacker 2008: 211)

In Figure 2.1, the component structure of the verb is represented as a relationship between a Trajector (the subject) and a Landmark (the object) (see section 2.1.2 for further details). This representation of the verb *admires* entails the unacceptability of the use of the verb without a Trajector (a subject), explicit or implicit, or without a Landmark (an object), such as in **Peter admires*. The component structure *Peter* integrates the Trajector of *admires* and the component structure *Mary* integrates the Landmark of *admires* to form the composite structure, that is, the construction given in (5). The dashed lines represent the descriptive factor that Langacker (2008: 183) calls *correspondence*,

which “indicate[s] how component and composite structures fit together in a coherent assembly” (2008: 183). Correspondences are thus used to better account for how the component structures are integrated to form the composite structures.

2.1.2. Conceptualization of actions and events

To account for the representation of actions and events, Langacker (1987a, 1987b, 1990, 1991, 2008) uses the metaphor of the “billiard-ball model” (1987a: 3), which, he claims, reflects our conceptualization of actions and events. He claims that, similarly to billard balls, the motion of physical objects is driven by energy and that, when the motion results in physical contact, the energy is transmitted from the moving object to the impacted object, which may, in turn, move and trigger further interaction or simply absorb the energy. An event can thus be represented as an action chain involving the transmission of energy through several participants. In an action chain, the prototypical agent is viewed as the head of the chain, the “energy source” (1987a: 7), and the prototypical patient as the tail, the “energy sink” (1987a: 7). As the head and the tail of the action chain, the archetypical agents and patients are viewed as the most prominent participants of the chain and any other participant is treated as an oblique. An instrument is thereby perceived as an intermediary participant, transmitting the energy from the agent to the patient.

Langacker (1987a) claims that the notions of grammatical subject and object cannot be equated with any archetypical role but depends on the construal of the event, as shown in (6):

- (6) a. Peter broke the vase with the hammer.
b. The hammer broke the vase.
c. The vase broke.

The whole action chain (agent → instrument → patient) is illustrated in (6a). In (6b), only the instrument and the patient are profiled and the instrument is in the position of the grammatical subject. In (6c), only the patient is profiled and it is chosen as the grammatical subject.

Langacker (1987a) suggests seven archetypal roles used to describe participants in the event: agent, instrument, patient, experiencer, mover, zero and theme. He defines the archetypal agent role as that “of a person who volitionally carries out physical activity resulting in contact with some external object” (Langacker 1987a: 4) and the archetypal instrument role as an “animate object manipulated by an agent to affect a patient” (1987a: 4). He claims that the archetypal roles of patients, experiencers and movers correspond to the three sorts of basic change a participant may undergo: being internally changed (patient), having a mental experience (experiencer) and being moved (mover). He characterizes the archetypal role zero as the role of an entity viewed in relation to a setting, that is, a static situation in which no change is involved (e.g., *Santa Claus exists.*). He uses the term *theme* to refer to any participant for which the characterization is neutral, that is, for which it is not specified whether the change is internal or external, physical or mental (e.g., *her desires* in *He satisfies her desires.*).

Langacker (1987a, 1990, 1991) categorizes the archetypal roles along two hierarchies: the energy flow hierarchy (agent > instrument > patient/mover/experiencer) and the initiative hierarchy (agent > experiencer > other). The energy flow hierarchy

corresponds more or less to the action chain defined above. The initiative hierarchy characterizes “the capacity of a participant to function as an original source of energy” (Langacker 1987a: 29), that is, to what extent a participant may be active in an event. If agents can be characterized as being active in the physical world, the level of activity of experiencers is restricted to abstract interactions with other entities, as illustrated in (7):

- (7) a. Peter kicked the ball.
 b. Peter saw the ball.

In (7a), the grammatical subject, *Peter*, is an agent, that is, an active participant inducing a change in the physical world. In (7b), *Peter* is still viewed as an active participant, but the interaction with the grammatical object is only perceptual. Hence, in (7b), the grammatical subject is an experiencer, since it does not induce any changes in the physical world, which implies a lower level of activity.

	SOURCE DOMAIN	RECIPIENT DOMAIN
ACTIVE PARTICIPANT	agent	experiencer
PASSIVE PARTICIPANT	instrument	patient mover zero theme

Table 2.1: Categorization of archetypal roles (based on Figure 9, Langacker 1987a: 30)

Langacker (1987a) provides the description in Table 2.1 as a representation of the oppositions between roles referring to active and passive participants, in relation to

the initiative hierarchy, and roles that belong to the source and the recipient domains, with regards to the energy flow hierarchy. On the one hand, agents and experiencers are considered as active participants, given that they can initiate events unlike passive participants (instruments, patients, movers, zeros and themes). On the other hand, only agents and instruments can be conceptualized as sources of energy in contrast to experiencers, patients, movers, zeros and themes that receive the energy flow.

Langacker (1991) uses the archetypal roles to suggest a uniform characterization of indirect objects, notably in French, which he views as experiencers, as illustrated in (8):

- (8) a. *J' ai parlé à ma mère.*
 I have talked at/to my mother
 'I talked to my mother.'
- b. *J' ai donné le livre à ma mère.*
 I have given the book at/to my mother
 'I gave the book to my mother.'

An experiencer belongs to the recipient domain and, as shown in (8), the indirect objects *à ma mère* 'to my mother' can be viewed as a recipient in terms of communication (8a) or of transfer (8b). Furthermore, the indirect objects can be seen as active participants in the reception of either the message (8a) or the transfer (8b). Langacker (1991: 327) therefore argues that the archetypal role of experiencer appears to be a particularly good fit to characterize indirect objects in French. A systematic correspondence between indirect objects and experiencers, however, raises some issues in French, as shown in (9):

- (9) *Il a pensé à sa mère.*
 he has thought at/to his mother
 'He thought of his mother.'

In (9), since the indirect object does not actively participate in the event, it appears difficult to characterize it as an experiencer. The semantic difference between the indirect objects in (8) and the one in (9) shows that the archetype role cannot be systematically attributed to an argument of the verb introduced by the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. While, in (8), the indirect objects can be interpreted as experiencers, in (9), the indirect object can only be viewed as a theme.

Langacker’s (1991) analysis of the indirect objects in French is problematic not only because of an erroneous generalization of the correspondence between indirect objects and experiencers, but also because he uses a semantic role approach to argument realization, which has been subject to much criticism in the literature (see Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005).

2.2. ARGUMENT REALIZATION

In this section, I first discuss the theoretical issues with semantic roles and provide alternative solutions for lexical semantic representations (section 2.2.1). Then, I review some of the most recent studies on argument alternations (section 2.2.2). Finally, I discuss the interplay between affectedness and transitivity in order to show how these notions should be integrated within the framework of Cognitive Grammar (section 2.2.3).

2.2.1. Lexical semantic representations

One of the most common models used to account for the semantic relations between the verb and its arguments is the one of semantic roles. Semantic roles are a set

of labels that are used to identify the role played by the verb arguments in an event, and as such, bear similarities with the archetypical roles proposed by Langacker (1987a, 1990, 1991) (see section 2.1.2).

Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005) point out several drawbacks with the semantic role approach to argument realization. First, they note that there are problems of definition and “grain-size” (2005: 38). Without reliable diagnostic tests to determine the semantic role of an argument, it seems difficult to offer the right “grain-size” to define the semantic roles (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005: 39). As observed by Dowty (1991: 553–555), additional semantic and syntactic investigations of a semantic role often lead to its “fragmentation”, that is, its subdivision into multiple roles. An example provided by Dowty (1991: 553) is a study by Cruse (1973), who proposes four distinct agent roles (i.e., volitive, effective, initiative and agentive), each based on a distinctive semantic and syntactic behavior.

The second problem Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005: 41) note is the one of cross-role generalizations. They argue that, if each semantic role is discrete and unanalyzable, there is no ground for a given semantic role to have more in common with one semantic role than another. This is the case, for instance, with patients, which share more properties with goals or recipients than with agents (2005: 41).

The third issue Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005: 42) point out regards one-to-one correspondence, that is, that an argument bears only one semantic role. Consider the following example:

(10) Peter sold his car to Mary.

In (10), as Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005: 42) observe, the subject *Peter* can be both seen as a source and an agent, that is, bearing more than one semantic role. The one-to-one correspondence, first defended by Fillmore (1968) with his Case Grammar theory, also turns out to be problematic with an overall generalization between semantic roles and syntactic properties. For example, as discussed in section 2.1.2, Langacker's (1987a) assumed correspondence between indirect objects in French and the experiencer archetypal role is not systematic.

The last problem Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005: 43) note concerns the overall explanatory effectiveness of semantic roles. They argue, for instance, that the fact that agents are realized as subjects across non-ergative languages does not provide any insight of why agents are realized as subjects (2005: 44).

One response to the limits of semantic roles has been the generalized semantic role approach (see Croft 1998; Dixon 1994; Dowty 1991; Kemmer 1993; Schlesinger 1995; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, *inter alia*). Van Valin & LaPolla (1997), for instance, argue that the specific semantic role(s) that each verb assigns to its argument(s) (i.e., breaker, giver, thinker) can be subsumed into traditional semantic roles (i.e., agent, patient, recipient), which can themselves be subsumed into two "macroroles", Actor and Undergoer. They claim that macroroles can be used to generalize argument-types with common grammatical properties (1997: 140). In other words, they argue for a correspondence between the macrorole Actor and the macrorole Undergoer and, respectively, the subject and the object of a transitive verb.

Their model takes into account some of the issues that the traditional approach to semantic roles raises. First, it entails that the semantic relation between a verb and its argument(s) can be viewed at different levels (i.e., macrorole, semantic role, verb-specific semantic role), which responds to the problems of definition and “grain-size” related to semantic roles. Then, each macrorole encapsulates the cross-role generalizations that can be found among several semantic roles. Finally, their model offers more flexibility to account for one-to-one correspondence between the arguments of the verbs and the semantic roles, as a macrorole subsumes several semantic roles.

Another generalized semantic role approach is the one defended by Dowty (1991), who proposes two generalized semantic roles, the Agent Proto-Role and the Patient Proto-Role. Unlike Van Valin & LaPolla’s (1997) approach, Dowty’s (1991) Proto-Roles do not subsume semantic roles, but distinctive clusters of lexical entailments², that is, properties imposed by the verb on its argument(s) in relation to the role played by the argument(s) in the event. His basic assumption is that the more lexical entailments defining the Agent Proto-Role an argument entails, the more likely it is going to be realized as a subject, and the more lexical entailments defining the Patient Proto-Role an argument entails, the more likely it is going to be realized as an object.

Dowty’s (1991) approach has been criticized in the literature (see Beavers 2006; Davis 2001; Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005, *inter alia*), among other things, for the limit of its scope and the very nature of the lexical entailments he proposes. Taking into account the criticisms of Dowty’s (1991) model, Beavers (2006) uses a revised lexical

² See Dowty (1991: 572) for the complete lists of the lexical entailments he defines.

entailment-based theory to analyze argument alternations. His analyses are reviewed in the following section.

2.2.2. Argument alternations

In his studies on argument alternations, Beavers (2006, 2009, 2010, 2011) demonstrates that the oblique argument shows a lower degree of affectedness than its direct counterpart and that the choice of a preposition depends on the lexical semantics of the verb that selects it.

Beavers (2010, 2011) argues for a scalar approach to affectedness and defines it in relation to the Affectedness Hierarchy (2011: 359), which is based on four main consecutive degrees of specificity of change, that is, quantized change (11), non-quantized change, (12) potential for change (13) and unspecified change (14):

(11) They widened the wall to 24 inches.

(12) They widened the wall.

(13) They hit the wall.

(14) They saw the wall.

Beavers (2010, 2011) associates the higher degree of affectedness with the notion of quantized change. Beavers defines quantized change as the change through which “the theme reaches a definite, specific state named by the predicate” (Beavers 2010: 833). Quantized change is illustrated in (11), in which the nature of the change is specified: the wall is 24 inches wider. Conversely, non-quantized change is illustrated in (12). The wall is wider but the degree of change is not specified, hence the non-quantized

characterization. The notion of potential change, which Beavers defines as the condition under which “the verb lexically specifies that there are specific possible outcomes” (2010: 835), is exemplified in (13). The predicate *hit* implies that the wall may have undergone a possible change; it does not implicate any definite change. Finally, the lowest degree of affectedness corresponds to unspecified change, as illustrated in (14).

Using the *What happened to X is Y* test of affectedness (see (15) and (16)) suggested by Cruse (1973: 13), Beavers (2010) demonstrates how the oblique argument of the verb *hit* entails less affectedness than its direct argument (15):

- (15)a. What happened to the wall is they hit it.
- b. ?What happened to the wall is they hit at it.

- (16) ?What happened to the wall is they saw it.

If, in (15a), the direct argument of the predicate *hit* can be characterized as entailing potential change, the oblique argument in (15b) is to be viewed as being specified for any change. As illustrated in (16), failing the *What happened to X is Y* test, demonstrated with *saw*, is evidence that the oblique argument in (15b) entails unspecified change (Beavers 2010: 838).

Beavers (2010) generalizes this analysis with the Morphosyntactic Alignment Principle (2010: 848), which stipulates that, for verbs displaying a direct/oblique argument alternation, the oblique argument entails less affectedness than the direct argument. This principle will be used to account for semantic differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of some verbs in French (see section 6.3).

Another principle suggested by Beavers (2009), revising Gawron's Argument Principle for Prepositions (1986: 344), is the Oblique Selection Principle (Beavers 2009: 122), which states that the verb can select a prepositional phrase as an alternative to a direct internal argument if the lexical semantics of the verb implicates the semantics of the preposition. Consider the example in (17):

(17) He loaded the car with our luggage.

As noted by Beavers (2009: 123), following Croft (1991: 178), *with*-obliques are "causally intermediates" (i.e., "instruments") between the agent and the patient. As the semantics of the verb *load* implicates a causally intermediate, in (17), the oblique phrase *with our luggage* can be realized as a causally intermediate between the agent *he* and the patient *the car*.

Beavers's (2009, 2010, 2011) studies emphasize two significant aspects in argument alternations. First, the choice of the prepositions in argument alternations is not arbitrary but motivated by the lexical semantics of the verb. Second, affectedness plays a central role in argument alternation and consequently needs to be integrated into the framework of Cognitive Grammar in order to account for the argument alternations under scrutiny in this study.

2.2.3. Affectedness and transitivity

The concepts of affectedness and transitivity have often been characterized as being closely interrelated. Hopper & Thompson (1980), for instance, considering transitivity as scalar, use the parameter of the affectedness of the object to determine the

degree of transitivity of clauses across languages. They argue that a clause with a totally affected object shows a higher degree of transitivity than one with a non-affected object. Their study has actually been criticized for considering affectedness as a mere parameter among others rather than a crucial one in determining the transitivity of a construction (see Tsunoda 1985).

In numerous studies focusing on prototypical transitivity, that is, the most recurring semantic properties of transitive constructions, affectedness is systematically involved (see DeLancey 1987; Givón 1985; Lakoff 1987; Lazard 2003; Næss 2008; Taylor 1995). Næss (2008), for instance, defines prototypical transitivity in relation to a set of features marking verb arguments. She suggests three main features: volitionality ([±VOL]), that is, whether an argument shows volitionality in its participation in an event or not, instigation ([±INST]), that is, whether the participation of an argument in an event instigates the event or not, and affectedness ([±AFF]), that is, whether an argument is affected by the event or not. She argues that a construction is prototypically transitive when the subject (agent) is marked by the features [+VOL], [+INST], [-AFF], and the object (patient), by the features [-VOL], [-INST], [+AFF].

As discussed in section 2.1.2, Langacker (1987a, 1990, 1991) characterizes verb arguments in terms of archetypal roles and does not posit the notion of affectedness as being central to his representation of transitivity. Langacker (1987a) views transitivity as a transfer of energy between a source (the agent) and a recipient (the patient). This conceptualization of transitivity is very close to the view of the Antique grammarians who coined the term *transitivity* (from <*transitivus* ‘passing over’), that is, the view that a

transitive verb entails a transfer from an argument of the verb to another argument (see Rousseau 1998). Langacker's (1987a) approach to transitivity, and to event conceptualization in general, is also found in Croft (1991, 2012), who, similarly to Langacker (1987a), conceptualizes events as action chains and transitivity as a transfer of force.

Given that both transitivity (see Hopper & Thompson 1980) and affectedness (see Beavers 2010, 2011) are gradable concepts, one way to incorporate the notion of affectedness within the general model of transitivity proposed by Langacker (1987a) could be to posit a correlation between the level of energy transmitted from the source to the recipient and the level of energy received by the recipient, that is, its affectedness. This model would entail not only that the level of energy, and consequently of affectedness, is set by the lexical semantics of the verb, but also that the level of energy involved in the event may depend on the nature of the source that transmits the energy. Following Næss (2008), as agents marked by the features [+VOL] and [+INST] show a higher degree of transitivity than agents marked by the features [-VOL] and [-INST], it could be posited that agents entailing a higher degree of transitivity in a construction emits more energy than agents showing a lower degree of transitivity. This model could also be a solution to the issues raised by the semantic role approach used by Langacker (1987a) (see section 2.2.1), if one were to define both the source and recipient of the transfer of energy in terms of macroroles (see Van Valin & LaPolla 1997).

In order to account for the difference in affectedness between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of a verb postulated by Beavers (2010, 2011) and

observed in the constructions under scrutiny (see Chapters 5 and 6), I develop a model of transitivity within the framework of Cognitive Grammar that posits a correlation between the level of energy and the level of affectedness of the object (see sections 5.1.2 and 6.3.2.3).

2.3. THE SEMANTICS OF PREPOSITIONS

In this section, I first present the various approaches to the semantic representations of prepositions found in the literature (section 2.3.1). Then, I discuss the notion of polysemy, which is central to the semantic representations of prepositions in the field of Cognitive Linguistics (section 2.3.2). Finally, I review the model of principled polysemy proposed by Tyler & Evans (2003) to represent the semantics of English prepositions.

2.3.1. Approaches to the semantic representations of prepositions

As discussed in the introduction, it is common in the literature to distinguish between two types of prepositions: lexical (i.e., meaningful) and functional (i.e., meaningless). Tseng (2000) questions this traditional dichotomy and argues for a spectrum of prepositional uses, ranging from the pole of lexical prepositional uses (i.e., high meaningfulness and low fixedness) to the pole of functional prepositional uses (i.e., low meaningfulness and high fixedness). In the framework of Cognitive Grammar, this assumption can be reinterpreted in light of the lexical/grammatical meaning continuum, suggested by Langacker (2008) (see section 2.1.1). The meaning of prepositions can

either tend toward the lexical pole (i.e., high meaningfulness) or toward the grammatical pole (i.e., low meaningfulness).

Most approaches to the semantics of prepositions in the literature have been centered on the meaning of lexical prepositions. Across languages, many lexical prepositions are spatial prepositions, that is, prepositions that encode a specific spatial configuration between elements. Vandeloise (1986, 1991) points out the limits of a purely formal approach to prepositions, that is, in geometrical or topological terms (see Bennett 1975; Cooper 1968; Leech 1969). He argues that any sound approach to the semantics of spatial prepositions needs to be functional, in virtue of the significant role of perspective associated to some spatial prepositions. The spatial preposition *behind*, for example, encodes a spatial relationship that entirely depends on the speaker's perspective.

One significant property of spatial prepositions is that they can be prone to be also used as functional (i.e., meaningless) prepositions. This property raises the issue of establishing correspondences between a given form and the various meanings it may have, lexical or functional. There are actually three main ways of treating the form/meaning pairing of prepositions. The correspondence can be viewed as homonymic, monosemic or polysemic.

The homonymic approach, in which each sense of a given form corresponds to a different lexical entry, is the one advocated for by theories viewing the lexicon as arbitrary and idiosyncratic and considering the fact that a given preposition can be used as both a lexical and functional preposition as accidental (see Chomsky 1995). Tyler & Evans (2003) point out that a homonymic approach faces some issues, notably, because

there appear to be rule-governed relationships in the lexicon (Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987b, 1991; Levin 1993) and that it fails to account for language as an evolving system since it presupposes that the meaning extensions of a lexical item are arbitrary.

The radically opposite view to the homonymic approach is the monosemic approach, that is, postulating only one meaning for each given preposition. In this approach, a form is paired with a highly abstract meaning, which is specified in context (Ruhl 1989). Ruhl (1989: 4) proposes the “monosemic bias” as a methodological principle. He claims that the researcher should seek a unitary meaning for a given word, and if she cannot account for a variation in meaning contextually or co-textually, she should then look for general rules that can relate the various meanings of the word. If general rules cannot be found, then the various meanings can be viewed as a case of homonymy.

A less radical model that aims to limit the proliferation of the senses associated to a given form, but which is not based on a monosemy/homosemy dichotomy is the concept of principled polysemy proposed by Tyler & Evans (2003). Before discussing this model in more depth (section 2.3.3), I review some of the major works on polysemy, which is a central concept to the representation of meaning in the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

2.3.2. Polysemy

Polysemy can generally be defined as “the association of two or more related senses with a single linguistic form” (Taylor 1995: 99). Among the various approaches to

polysemy (see Ravin & Leacock 2000), the central concept in the representation of polysemic models is the relatedness of senses posited by the definition. In the classical approach to polysemy, the relatedness of senses is viewed through rule-based derivations (Apresjan 1974; Lyons 1977). Lyons (1977: 550) suggests three main criteria to consider the various senses of a given linguistic form as polysemic: there are clear semantic rules through which the various senses are derived; the various senses are etymologically related; only words that belong to the same syntactic category can be viewed as polysemic. The first criterion establishes the basic definition of polysemy, which excludes cases of homonymy (e.g., *bank*, the financial institution, vs. *bank*, as in *the bank of a river*). The second criterion emphasizes the importance of diachrony in establishing a case of polysemy (see section 3.2.3 for further discussion). The third criterion excludes cases of conversion or zero-derivation as cases of polysemy (e.g., *to drink* vs. *a drink*).

In Cognitive Linguistics, the most adopted approach to polysemy is the prototypical approach (Fillmore 1982; Geeraerts 1993; Lakoff 1987; Taylor 1995), which significantly departs from the classical approach (see Taylor 1995). The prototypical approach is inspired by the works of the philosopher Wittgenstein (1953) and the psychologist Rosh (1977) on categorization. In a discussion on the meaning of the word *game*, Wittgenstein (1953) argues that there is no single feature common to all the types of games and concludes that the best way to account for the category “game” is by resorting to the concept of family resemblance, that is, the fact that the various items of a given category share common features, which are not necessarily common to all the elements of this category. In psychology, Rosh (1977) demonstrates that people tend to

categorize elements of a given category on the basis of the resemblance of these elements with the prototypical element of this category. The concept of family resemblance thus differs from the one of prototype as it does not posit that one item of a given category (i.e., the prototype) shares more common features with the other items than any other item.

One of the prototypical approaches to word meaning is the model of radial networks suggested by Lakoff (1987). Lakoff (1987) argues that the general meaning of a word can be viewed as a cluster of the various senses of this word. For instance, the meaning of *mother* is an ideation of various models: the birth mother, the genetic mother, the marital mother, etc. The sum of these models can be viewed as an ideal case, from which more marginal categories, that is, its meaning extensions, derive. For example, *mother* can be viewed as a radial model with a central category (i.e., the ideal case) from which the more marginal categories (e.g., surrogate mother, adoptive mother, etc.) derive by the general principles of metaphor and metonymy.

The concept of radial networks proposed by Lakoff (1987) has been criticized in the literature, notably for its application to the various senses of the preposition *over* (see Kreitzer 1997). Vandeloise (1990) observes that polysemic network representations may fail to offer the simple enumeration of the type of usages of a given preposition. This view of polysemy is very close to what Sandra (1998) calls *polysemy fallacy*, that is, “the tendency to look for polysemy even when there is no evidence for it” (1998: 361). Within polysemic network representations, there may indeed be examples of distinct senses that would be better described in terms of vagueness rather than in terms of polysemy.

One of the major issues with polysemy is that there is sometimes no clear-cut distinction between the different manifestations of different senses (i.e., polysemy) and the different manifestations of one sense (i.e., vagueness). Geeraerts (1993), for instance, gives the example of the verb *to eat*, which can refer to eating with a fork or eating with a spoon. Although these two ways of eating are different, this difference should be viewed as an instantiation of vagueness, that is, as a variation of the sense of *to eat*.

One way of accounting for the fuzzy boundary between polysemy and vagueness is to view polysemy as a continuum between the two extreme poles of homonymy and vagueness (Geeraerts 1993; Tuggy 1993). Polysemy can thus be assumed to be a dynamic concept, varying in relation to homonymy and vagueness (see Brisard et al. 2001). The more distinct two senses are, the closer the case of polysemy is to the homonymy pole; the less distinct two senses are, the closer the case of polysemy is to the vagueness pole.

2.3.3. Principled polysemy

The model of principled polysemy is proposed by Tyler & Evans (2003) in their study on the semantics of English prepositions, couched in the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. This model is a response to the polysemy fallacy underlined by Sandra (1998) and is based on a methodological approach that aims to limit the proliferation of senses in polysemic networks.

Tyler & Evans (2003: 42) provide two criteria to determine whether senses should be considered distinct. The first criterion posits that a sense has to contain additional meaning, in relation to other senses, to be characterized as distinct. The second criterion

postulates that a distinct sense has to be context-independent. Consider the following examples:

- (18)a. He jumped over the wall.
- b. He crawled over the wall.

(19) He placed a picture over the hole.

In (18), there is a difference of sense that is related to contact. While the sentence in (18a) does not entail a contact between the Trajector *he* and the Landmark *the wall*, the sentence in (18b) does. Tyler & Evans (2003) do not consider this difference as resulting from distinct senses of *over*. In both examples, *over* describes the same spatial configuration and, therefore, does not contain any additional meaning in any of the two sentences. Furthermore, the notion of contact is context-dependent. The lexical semantics of the verb *jump* does not imply contact, while that of *crawl* does. In (19), Tyler & Evans (2003: 43) argue that *over* contains an additional meaning, the one of covering and obscuring the Landmark *the hole*, which is not found in the examples given in (18), for instance. They claim that the meaning of obscuring and covering is also context-independent as a speaker needs to know this sense to be able to interpret that, in (19), for instance, the picture is covering and obscuring the hole.

The two criteria that Tyler & Evans (2003) suggest to determine if senses are distinct limit the proliferation of senses in two ways. First, the difference of senses characterized as vague is not interpreted as the source of two distinct senses. In their polysemic network, senses that differ in terms of vagueness are gathered in clusters.

Second, only senses that show evidence of polysemy, as they contain additional meaning and are context-independent, can be viewed as distinct senses.

Tyler & Evans (2003) also use a prototypical approach to polysemy. In order to determine what the prototype of the polysemic network should be, they provide a set of criteria among which the two first are of particular interest for this study. The first one is the primacy of the original meaning of the preposition, that is, in Tyler & Evans's (2003: 47) words, "the earliest attested meaning". This first criterion emphasizes the importance of considering language as an evolving system and the assumption shared in Cognitive Linguistics that the diachronic dimension of language should be taken into consideration (see Langacker 2008, *inter alia*). The second criterion is the predominance of the prototypical sense within the polysemic network. In the case of spatial prepositions, this predominance is interpreted as the spatial configuration that is found in the majority of the senses (Tyler & Evans 2003: 48).

In order to represent the prototypical sense of the English prepositions, that is, the most predominant sense in the polysemic network, Tyler & Evans (2003) use the model of proto-scene, based on the concept of spatial scene. They define a spatial scene as "an abstract representation of a recurring real world spatio-physical configuration mediated by human conceptual processing" (Tyler & Evans 2003: 50). This definition is based on the assumption that the representation of meaning is conceptually mediated by the human mind (see Fauconnier 1997; Jackendoff 1983; Langacker 1987b, *inter alia*). Their definition of proto-scene is based on the concept of spatial scene: "an idealized mental representation across the recurring spatial scenes associated with a particular spatial

particle” (Tyler & Evans 2003: 52). The concept of proto-scene is thus related to the cognitive process of schematization (see section 2.1.1) and encapsulates the primary sense that can be found across the various uses of a spatial preposition. In their model, the prototypical element is therefore the most recurring spatial sense of the preposition.

Tyler & Evans (2003) argue for a primacy of the spatio-physical meaning in the semantic representations of prepositions. They claim that the spatio-physical meaning is the most meaningful sense and that all the other senses of the preposition derive directly or indirectly from this more concrete meaning. They also argue that both the spatio-configuration of a preposition and the functions that it entails lead to the meaning extensions of a preposition. For instance, the use of *on* in *you can count on me* implies the function of support entailed by the spatial configuration of the preposition *on*.

In my analyses of the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6), I mainly follow the model suggested by Tyler & Evans (2003). I assume that the meanings of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations derive directly or indirectly from the original spatial configuration or proto-scene of *à* ‘at/to’ and that the meanings of *à* ‘at/to’ need to exhibit family resemblance with the other senses of *à* ‘at/to’ (see section 3.2.3 for further discussion).

2.4. SUMMARY

In section 2.1, I presented the fundamental assumptions of the theoretical framework of Cognitive Grammar, among which grammar is considered meaningful. Following Langacker (2008), I explained that the difference between lexical and grammatical meanings can be viewed as a continuum between lexical meaning (i.e.,

highly specific meaning) and grammatical meaning (i.e., highly schematic). I also reviewed Langacker's (1987a) conceptualization of actions and events, which considers the transitivity of a verb as a transfer of energy from the source (the agent) to the recipient (the patient) and defines the semantic relationships between verbs and their arguments in terms of archetypal roles.

In section 2.2, I showed the limits of the semantic role approach to lexical semantic representations, which includes Langacker's (1987a) archetypal roles, and reviewed some of the solutions found in the literature to the shortcomings of this approach. I then summarized Beavers's (2009, 2010, 2011) analyses of argument alternations in order to point out the importance of both the semantics of prepositions and the notion of affectedness when analyzing argument alternations. I finally discussed the importance of the notion of affectedness in transitivity models.

In section 2.3, I reviewed the various approaches to the semantics of prepositions found in the literature, namely the homonymic, monosemic and polysemic approaches, focusing on the polysemic approach, which is the most commonly adopted approach in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. I also presented the model of principled polysemy that Tyler & Evans (2003) propose to represent the semantics of prepositions in English, which is the model that I mainly use in my semantic analyses of the preposition *à* 'at/to' in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 3: The Preposition *à* ‘at/to’

The preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is one of the most used prepositions in modern French and, as such, can be found in a variety of syntactic environments. The multiplicity of its uses, either lexical, as a spatial preposition, or functional, as the grammatical marker of the dative, for instance, has often been viewed as the source of a challenge when attempting to characterize it semantically. In this chapter, I present the general properties of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ and discuss its semantic characterization, from both the diachronic and synchronic viewpoints, in order to provide a general context for my semantic analyses of *à* ‘at/to’.

In section 3.1, I present the syntactic aspects of the preposition, that is, its general syntactic and morphosyntactic properties and the properties of the prepositional phrases it introduces in verbal contexts. In section 3.2, I focus on the diachronic aspects of the preposition, and more specifically, on its grammaticalization, in order to show how the various synchronic senses it expresses are related diachronically. In section 3.3, I review some of the major works on the semantics of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’, which offer different views on whether the preposition is meaningful or not and on whether it expresses a unique abstract core meaning. In section 3.4, I provide a summary of this chapter.

3.1. SYNTACTIC ASPECTS

In this section, I first present the general syntactic and morphosyntactic properties of *à* ‘at/to’ (section 3.1.1) and then focus on the syntactic properties of prepositional phrases introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts (section 3.1.2).

3.1.1. Syntactic and morphosyntactic properties

As previously stated, the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ can be found in a variety of syntactic contexts. It can be used to form compound nouns (1) and to introduce noun complements (2), adjective complements (3), infinitives (4), verbal arguments (5) and adverbials (6):

- (1) *une machine à laver*
a machine at/to to wash
‘a washing machine’

- (2) *un homme aux yeux bleus*
a man at/to.the eyes blue
‘a blue-eyed man’

- (3) *Il est prêt à partir.*
he is ready at/to leave
‘He is ready to leave.’

- (4) *Cela reste à faire.*
that remains at/to to do
‘That remains to be done.’

- (5) *Il obéit aux ordres.*
he obeys at/to.the orders
‘He obeys orders.’

- (6) *Il a rencontré sa femme à l’ université.*
he has met his wife at/to the university
‘He met his wife in college.’

The diversity of the syntactic uses of *à* ‘at/to’ illustrated in (1)–(6) shows that the syntactic role of the preposition could be hard to define in a uniform fashion. Although *à* ‘at/to’ systematically marks intersyntagmatic relations, that is, relates phrases together (see Pottier 1962), it does so at various levels, that is, at the word (1)–(2) or predicate (3)–(6) level. The preposition *à* ‘at/to’ also shows a specific syntactic behavior with

regards to other French prepositions. In (1)–(6), the only use of *à* ‘at/to’ that is common to the whole class of French prepositions is the one in (6), in which *à* ‘at/to’ is used as a spatial preposition. Furthermore, the status of *à* ‘at/to’ as a preposition raises the question of whether it can be viewed as an autonomous element, that is, not determined by syntax, or as a case marker, as observed by Melis (2001: 32). Consider the examples in (7) and (8):

- (7) *Il a rencontré sa femme dans l’ université.*
 he has met his wife in the university
 ‘He met his wife in the university.’
- (8) **Il obéit dans les ordres.*
 he obeys in the orders
 ‘*He obeys in the orders.’

In some cases, the use of *à* ‘at/to’ can be regarded as autonomous, in the sense that it competes with other spatial prepositions (e.g., *à* ‘at/to’ vs. *dans* ‘in’). The choice of the preposition depends on the speaker’s construal of the event. In (6), the preposition indicates a general localization (see Melis 2001) while, in (7), the speaker localizes the event more specifically. In other words, in (7), the speaker specifies that the event took place inside the university. Conversely, the unacceptability of (8), in contrast to the acceptability of (5), illustrates a use of *à* ‘at/to’ that is not autonomous, in the sense that, in (5), the use of *à* ‘at/to’ is obligatory and cannot be substituted with another preposition. In (5), *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized as a case marker, indicating the grammatical relation between the verb and its argument.

As a spatial preposition, *à* ‘at/to’ differs from the other spatial prepositions with regards to the types of determiners with which it is compatible. Unlike the other spatial

prepositions, *à* ‘at/to’ is rarely compatible with an indefinite determiner phrase (see Borillo 2001; Vandeloise 1988), as shown in (9) and (10):

- (9) a. *Il travaille à la bibliothèque.*
 he works at/to the library
 ‘He is working at the library.’
- b. *?Il travaille à une bibliothèque.*
 he works at/to a library
 ‘He is working at a library.’
- (10) a. *Il travaille dans la bibliothèque.*
 he works in the library
 ‘He is working in the library.’
- b. *Il travaille dans une bibliothèque.*
 he works in a library
 ‘He is working in a library.’

While the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is compatible with the definite determiner phrase *la bibliothèque* ‘the library’ (9a), it is not with the indefinite determiner phrase *une bibliothèque* ‘a library’ (9b). In contrast, the preposition *dans* ‘in’ in (10) is acceptable both with a definite (10a) and an indefinite (10b) determiner phrase.

In relation to the specific properties of *à* ‘at/to’ as a spatial preposition, Ruwet (1982) argues that the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ cannot altogether be described as belonging to the class of spatial prepositions because it cannot be coordinated with other spatial prepositions. Such a characterization of *à* ‘at/to’ may be, however, problematic, as shown in (11) and (12):

- (11) a. *?Il travaille à ou dans la maison?*
 he works at/to or in the house
 ‘?Does he work at or in the house?’

- b. *La boîte est sur ou sous la table?*
 the box is on or under the table
 ‘Is the box on or under the table?’

- (12) *Vous allez à ou vers Rouen?*
 you go at/to or toward Rouen
 ‘Are you going to or toward Rouen?’

The coordination of *à* ‘at/to’ with *dans* ‘in’ leads to the low acceptability of the sentence in (11a), while the coordination of the spatial prepositions *sur* ‘on’ and *sous* ‘under’ does not (11b). Miller (1992), however, questions Ruwet’s (1982) argument given that the coordination of *à* ‘at/to’ with other spatial prepositions can be acceptable in some cases, as in (12), in which *à* ‘at/to’ is coordinated with the preposition *vers* ‘toward’.

Another property supporting the assumption that the preposition *à* ‘at/to’, along with the preposition *de* ‘of/from’, differs from the other French prepositions is that *à* ‘at/to’ and *de* ‘of/from’ combine with the masculine definite article *le* ‘the’ and the plural definite article *les* ‘the’ to form portmanteau determiners: *au* (= <*à*+*le*>), *aux* (= <*à*+*les*>), *du* (= <*de*+*le*>) and *des* (= <*de*+*les*>).

The specific properties of *à* ‘at/to’, and *de* ‘of/from’, have led some linguists to not consider them as prepositions (see Marque-Pucheu 2008). Gross (1968), for instance, observes that the syntactic properties of these two elements are very close to those of clitics. Miller (1992) characterizes them as affixes and Blinkenberg (1960) describes *à* ‘at/to’ as a mere morpheme of transitivity.

Some linguists consider that there are two types of *à* ‘at/to’: lexical and functional (Abeillé et al. 2006; Gabriel 2003). Abeillé et al. (2006), for example, demonstrate that *à* ‘at/to’ exhibits two distinct syntactic behaviors, depending on whether *à* ‘at/to’ introduces

an infinitive or not, and note that, when *à* ‘at/to’ introduces an infinitive, it should not be regarded as a true preposition. Given that my study mainly focuses on *à* ‘at/to’ followed by a nominal phrase, and more importantly on its semantic import, I do not take into account this difference of syntactic status and I uniformly consider it as a preposition.

3.1.2. Properties of prepositional phrases in verbal contexts

As observed in section 3.1.1, *à* ‘at/to’ can be used, among other things, to introduce verb arguments and adverbials, which can lead to cases of syntactic ambiguity, that is, the impossibility of clearly determining at first glance whether a prepositional phrase introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ is a verb argument or an adverbial (i.e., an adjunct). Consider the examples in (13):

- (13)a. *Il va à la maison.*
 he goes at/to the house
 ‘He is going to the house.’
- b. *Il dort à la maison.*
 he sleeps at/to the house
 ‘He is sleeping at the house.’

The two sentences in (13) exhibit the same apparent structure (i.e., verb followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by *à* ‘at/to’), and the prepositional phrase *à la maison* ‘at the house’ could be characterized as either an argument or an adverbial.

Tellier (1995) provides a series of syntactic tests that can be used to distinguish between arguments and adverbials, illustrated in the sets of examples in (14)–(16):

- (14)a. **Il va, et cela à la maison.*
 he goes and that at/to the house
 ‘*He is going, and does so, to the house.’

- b. *Il dort, et cela à la maison.*
 he sleeps and that at/to the house
 ‘He is sleeping, and is so, at the house.’
- (15)a. **Il va à la maison et en fait autant au bureau.*
 he goes at/to the house and of.it does as much at/to.the office
 ‘*He goes to the house and does the same to the office.’
- b. *Il dort à la maison et en fait autant au bureau.*
 he sleeps at/to the house and of.it does as much at/to.the office
 ‘He sleeps at the house and does the same at the office.’
- (16)a. **À la maison, il va.*
 at/to the house he goes
 ‘*To the house, he goes.’
- b. *À la maison, il dort.*
 at/to the house he sleeps
 ‘At the house, he sleeps.’

The set of examples in (14) illustrates the *et cela* ‘and that’ insertion test. If the insertion of *et cela* ‘and that’ between the verb and the prepositional phrase leads ungrammaticality, the prepositional phrase can be viewed as an argument of the verb (14a); if not, it is regarded as an adverbial, that is, an adjunct (14b). The data given in (15) exemplify the *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ test. The phrase *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ substitutes the verb and its arguments. If *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ cannot be followed by another prepositional phrase (15a), the prepositional phrase is considered to be an argument. If *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ can be followed by another prepositional phrase, as in (15b), it means that *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ only substitutes the verb (*dort* ‘sleeps’) and consequently that the prepositional phrase is an adverbial. The examples given in (16) illustrate the fronting test. If the prepositional phrase cannot be fronted, it is regarded as an argument (16a), and if it can be fronted, it is

viewed as an adverbial (16b).

As verb arguments, the prepositional phrases introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ exhibit different syntactic behaviors. Herslund (1988) distinguishes three types of indirect objects introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ (IO_à): locative IO_à, neutral IO_à, and dative IO_à, respectively illustrated in (17), (18) and (19):

(17)a. *Il va à la bibliothèque.*
he goes at/to the library
‘He is going to the library.’

b. *Il y va.*
he there goes
‘He is going there.’

(18)a. *Il pense à sa mère.*
he thinks at/to his mother
‘He thinks of his mother.’

b. *Il pense à elle.*
he thinks at/to her
‘He thinks of her.’

c. *Il y pense.*
he there thinks
‘He thinks of her.’

(19)a. *Il obéit à sa mère.*
he obeys at/to his mother
‘He obeys his mother.’

b. *Il lui obéit.*
he to.her obeys
‘He obeys her.’

The three types of IO_à are differentiated in relation to the pronoun that can replace them.

The locative IO_à (17a) is replaced with the pronoun *y* ‘there’ (17b). The neutral IO_à (18a) can be replaced with either a disjunctive pronoun (i.e., the tonic pronoun *elle* ‘her’

in (18b)) or with the pronoun *y* ‘there’ (18c). The dative IOà is replaced with a dative pronoun (i.e., *lui* ‘to her’ in (19b)).

Herslund (1988) notes that the locative IOà, on the one hand, and the neutral and dative IOà, on the other hand, exhibit two main differences: the possibility of replacing the IOà with another prepositional phrase and the type of disjunctive and interrogative pronoun that can replace the IOà, as illustrated in (20) and (21):

- (20) a. *Il va au restaurant.*
 he goes at/to.the restaurant
 ‘He is going to the restaurant.’
- b. *Il va dans un restaurant.*
 he goes in a restaurant
 ‘He is going to a restaurant.’
- c. *C’ est là³ où il va.*
 it is there where he goes
 ‘It is where he is going.’
- d. *Où est-ce qu’ il va?*
 where is it that he goes
 ‘Where is he going?’
- (21) a. *Il pense/ obéit à sa mère.*
 he thinks obeys at/to his mother
 ‘He thinks of/obeys his mother.’
- b. **Il pense/ obéit dans sa mère.*
 he thinks obeys in his mother
 ‘*He thinks/obeys in his mother.’
- c. *C’ est à elle qu’ il pense/ obéit.*
 it is at/to her that he thinks obeys
 ‘It is her that he thinks of/obeys.’

³ Note that *là* ‘there’ is not a disjunctive pronoun *per se* but an adverb that can be used as a pro-form to refer to places.

- d. *À qui est-ce qu'il pense/ obéit?*
 at/to who is it that he thinks obeys
 'Who does he think of/obey?'

The locative IOà (20a) can be replaced with another prepositional phrase (i.e., *dans un restaurant* 'in a restaurant' in (20b)), which is impossible with neutral and dative IOà (see (21b)). Furthermore, the pro-form and interrogative pronouns that are used to replace locative IOà are respectively *là* 'there' (20c) and *où* 'where' (20d), while they are respectively the tonic pronoun introduced by *à* 'at/to' (*à elle* 'at/to her' in (21c)) and the interrogative *qui* 'who' (as well as potentially *quoi* 'what' for neutral IOà) introduced by *à* 'at/to' for the neutral and dative IOà (21d).

Herslund (1988) claims that the main difference between the neutral and dative IOà depends on the possibility of substituting the IOà with the dative pronouns (i.e., *lui* 'to him/her', *leur* 'to them'), as illustrated in (22) and (23):

- (22)a. *Il pense à ses amis.*
 he thinks at/to his friends
 'He thinks of his friends.'

- b. **Il leur pense.*
 he to.them thinks
 'He thinks of them.'

- c. *Il pense à eux.*
 he thinks at/to them
 'He thinks of them.'

- d. *Il y pense.*
 he there thinks
 'He thinks of them.'

- (23)a. *Il obéit à ses parents.*
 he obeys at/to his parents
 'He obeys his parents.'

- b. *Il leur obéit.*
 he to.them obeys
 ‘He obeys them.’
- c. *Il obéit seulement à eux.*
 he obeys only at/to them
 ‘He obeys only them.’
- d. *?Il obéit à eux.*
 he obeys at/to them
 ‘He obeys them.’
- e. **Il y obéit.* (*y* ‘there’=*mes parents* ‘my parents’)
 he there obeys
 ‘He obeys them.’

Dative pronouns cannot replace a neutral IOà (22b); only tonic pronouns (22c) or the pronoun *y* ‘there’ (22d) can be used to replace neutral IOà. In contrast, dative IOà can be replaced with dative pronouns (23b) and with tonic pronouns in some specific contexts, such as in (23c), but not in (23d). The pronoun *y* ‘there’ cannot be used to substitute dative IOà (23e).

The various pronominal properties proposed by Herslund (1988) to distinguish the three IOà are summarized in Table 3.1:

	Disjunctive pronoun	Conjunctive pronoun
Locative IOà	<i>là</i> ‘there’	<i>y</i> ‘there’
Neutral IOà	<i>à</i> ‘at/to’ + tonic pronoun	<i>y</i> ‘there’
Dative IOà	<i>à</i> ‘at/to’ + tonic pronoun	dative pronoun

Table 3.1: Pronominal properties of IOà (based on (2.27), Herslund 1988: 48)

Table 3.1 differentiates disjunctive from conjunctive pronouns, that is, pronominal clitics that are placed before the verb. Herslund (1988) notes that neutral IOà share properties with both the locative IOà (the pronoun *y* ‘there’ as a conjunctive pronoun) and dative IOà (*à* ‘at/to’ followed by a tonic pronoun as a disjunctive pronoun).

Herslund (1988) also notes that specific verbs can select various types of IOà, such as *laisser* ‘to leave’ in (24), *arriver* ‘to arrive/to come to’ in (25) and *obéir* ‘to obey’ in (26):

(24) a. *Il a laissé son livre à la bibliothèque.*
 he has left his book at/to the library
 ‘He left his book at the library.’

b. *Il y a laissé son livre.*
 he there has left his book
 ‘He left his book there.’

c. *Il a laissé son livre à son frère.*
 he has left his book at/to his brother
 ‘He left his book to his brother.’

d. *Il lui a laissé son livre.*
 he to.him has left his book
 ‘He left him his book.’

(25) a. *Il est arrivé à Paris.*
 he is arrived at/to Paris
 ‘He arrived in Paris.’

b. *C’ est là où il est arrivé.*
 it is there where he is arrived
 ‘It is where he arrived.’

c. *Il est arrivé à cette conclusion.*
 he is come at/to this conclusion
 ‘He came to this conclusion.’

- d. *C' est à quoi il est arrivé.*
 it is at/to what he is come
 'It is what he came to.'
- (26)a. *Il obéit à son père.*
 he obeys at/to his father
 'He obeys his father.'
- b. *Il lui obéit.*
 he to.him obeys.
 'He obeys him.'
- c. *Il obéit aux règlements.*
 he obeys at/to.the rules
 'He obeys the rules.'
- d. *Il y obéit.*
 he there obeys
 'He obeys them.'

The verb *laisser* 'to leave' in (24) can be followed by a locative IOà (24a), as attested by the use of the conjunctive pronoun *y* 'there' in (24b), or by a dative IOà (24c), as shown by the use of the dative pronoun *lui* 'to him' in (24d). The verb *arriver* 'to arrive/to come to' can select a locative IOà (25a), as evidenced by the use of the pro-form *là* 'there' in (25b), or a neutral IOà (25c), as shown by the use of *à quoi* 'at/to what' (25d). The verb *obéir* 'to obey' can be followed by either a dative IOà (26a), as attested by the use of the dative pronoun *lui* in (26b), or by a neutral IOà (26c), as evidenced by the use of the pronoun *y* 'there' in (26d).

The pronoun-based approach proposed by Herslund (1988) to distinguish the different types of indirect objects is part of a more global approach to verb arguments, which is known in the literature as the pronominal approach to verbal valence, that is, the categorization of verb arguments and adverbials in relation to the type of pronouns that

can replace them (see Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1984). Goyens et al. (2002) also use this approach to categorize most of the various uses and senses of *à* ‘at/to’ in relation to pronouns and interrogative words, in order to compare the diachronic evolution of the various senses and uses of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ with its equivalents in other Romance languages. This study thus reflects the importance of diachrony in the analysis of the senses and uses of *à* ‘at/to’.

3.2. DIACHRONIC ASPECTS

In this section, I show how the various senses of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ are diachronically related and discuss the importance of the diachronic dimension of language. After providing the main theoretical foundations of grammaticalization in section 3.2.1, I summarize the main steps of the grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’ and relate them to the synchronic senses of the preposition in section 3.2.2. Finally, in section 3.2.3, I discuss the numerous similarities between the theory of grammaticalization and the approach of prototype-based polysemic networks.

3.2.1. Grammaticalization

Originally coined by Meillet (1912), the term *grammaticalization* refers to both a theoretical framework and a diachronic process of language change. The commonly accepted definition of grammaticalization as a diachronic process is the one provided by Kurylowicz (1975: 52): “Grammaticalization consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a

more grammatical status”. Although this definition restricts the scope of the phenomenon to morphemes, it still presents grammaticalization as it is generally conceptualized in the literature, through the implicit notion of a continuum from the less to the more grammatical. Grammaticalization is thus to be seen as a diachronic process through which a linguistic item gradually acquires a more abstract grammatical meaning.

This definition also encapsulates more specific corollary phenomena related to grammaticalization: extension of forms, desemanticization (or semantic bleaching), decategorization and erosion (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 2; see also, Heine et al. 1991; Hopper & Traugott 2003; Lehmann 1985; Sweetser 1988). The grammaticalization of an item involves the extension of the uses of this item, that is, the use of the item in new contexts. The concept of desemanticization refers to the loss of the (more) concrete meaning of an element undergoing grammaticalization. The desemanticization of an item often develops in parallel with erosion, that is, the loss of phonetic substance. The loss of lexical meaning through grammaticalization typically leads to the decategorization of the grammaticalized element. Consider the sets of examples in (27) and (28):

- (27)a. He has the book./*He’s the book.
- b. He doesn’t have the book.

- (28)a. He has read the book./He’s read the book.
- b. He hasn’t read the book.

The examples in (27) and (28) illustrate some of the synchronic uses of the English verb *have* that has undergone grammaticalization (see Lecki 2010). These data exemplify the extension of the uses of *have*, from the expression of possession, still attested in modern English (27), to its role as an auxiliary that is used, for instance, in the formation of the

present perfect in (28). The examples in (28) show that *have* as an auxiliary has been desemanticized. In (28), it no longer expresses possession as it does in (27). They also illustrate a case of erosion. In (28a), *have* as an auxiliary can be realized as 's (/z/), which is not the case for the lexical use of *have* in (27). Finally, the syntactic difference in the expression of negation in (27b) and (28b) exemplify a case of decategorization. *Have* in (27) has the same syntactic properties as a lexical verb, as shown by the negation with *doesn't* in (27b), while it shares the syntactic properties of auxiliaries in (28b).

As a theoretical framework, grammaticalization has a cognitive basis (Heine et al. 1991, *inter alia*). Heine et al. (1991) argue that grammaticalization can be viewed as a cognitive process that has problem solving as its main goal. The problems arising from the tensions between the concepts of economy, efficiency, clarity and expressivity related to language can indeed be solved by the extension of the uses of a given form through metaphorical and metonymic processes, which ultimately lead to the grammaticalization of the form. For instance, the grammaticalization of the Latin past participle *ADVERSUS* 'turned to/directed' into the modern French preposition *vers* 'toward' can be argued to result from the tension between the loss of expressivity of the grammaticalized Latin preposition *AD* 'toward', which was originally used to express spatial approximation (see section 3.2.2), and the need to express spatial approximation (see Fagard 2006).

There is a consensus in the literature on the major role played by metaphorical changes in the process of grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994; Heine et al. 1991, *inter alia*), that is, "specifying one usually more complex thing in terms of another not present in the context" (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 93), as well as metonymic changes, that is,

“specifying one meaning in terms of another that is present, even if only covertly in the context” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 93). The two processes are not mutually exclusive (see Barcelona 2003) and both play as significant a role in grammaticalization processes (see Cuyckens 2002). Cuyckens (2002) claims that, in English, the extension from the use of the preposition *to* to express a spatial goal to its use to express purpose is better interpreted in terms of metonymic change, given the semantic contiguity between the notions of spatial goal and purpose.

The importance of the role played by metaphor and metonymy in grammaticalization correlates with another general dimension associated with it, namely, the principle of unidirectionality, that is, the fact that an item is more likely to go from the lexical to the grammatical, or from a concrete to an abstract meaning, than the opposite (see Hopper & Traugott 2003). This principle is, for instance, reflected in the concept of grammaticalization chains, suggested by Heine et al. (1991) and Heine (1992). They use grammaticalization chains as a way of representing the gradable steps through which an item has been grammaticalized.

Although grammaticalization has been used to account for numerous linguistic changes, it has been criticized in the literature (Campbell 2001; Joseph 2002, *inter alia*), essentially because of the principle of unidirectionality. Joseph (2002), for instance, questions the relevance of grammaticalization by arguing that it is an epiphenomenon and not a process, given that there are apparent counterexamples to unidirectionality. Hopper & Traugott (2003) point out that the hypothesis of unidirectionality is not deterministic and that it should be seen as reflecting a general trend that can account for cases of

grammaticalization. Furthermore, as observed by Lehmann (1995), the theoretical apparatus of the grammaticalization framework is a powerful tool for descriptive linguistics, from a cross-linguistic viewpoint, and provides a strong cognitive basis to account for both diachronic and synchronic phenomena.

3.2.2. Grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’

Using the Grammaticalization framework, Kilroe (1987) studies the diachronic evolution of the modern French preposition *à* ‘at/to’ and accounts for the derivation of the different senses in terms of metaphor and/or analogy. Her findings are partially represented in Figure 3.1:

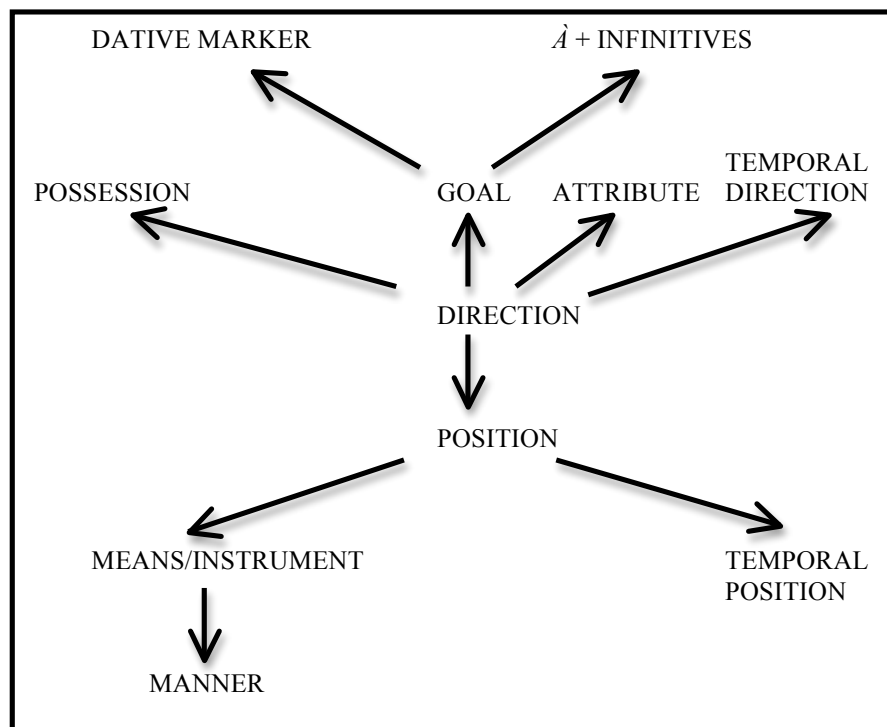


Figure 3.1: Grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’ (based on Kilroe 1987: 249)

In Figure 3.1, the arrows represent the semantic extensions from one sense to the other. As discussed in section 3.2.1, the process of grammaticalization entails a change from lexical to grammatical status or from less grammatical to more grammatical status. In other words, grammaticalization entails a change from a more lexical meaning (i.e., more specific) to a more grammatical meaning (i.e., less specific) (see section 2.1.1). This change of meaning is observed not only in the extensions of the senses/uses of the preposition, but also in the general desemanticization of the preposition. Kilroe (1987) shows that the desemanticization of the various senses of the preposition correlates with the use of competitive prepositions expressing some of the desemanticized senses of *à* ‘at/to’ in a more specific way (see Spang-Hanssen 1963).

The various senses listed in Figure 3.1, which, in modern French, can be less specific meanings, are illustrated by the following modern French data:

- (29) a. *Je vais à la maison.*
 I go at/to the house
 ‘I am going to the house.’
- b. *Je suis à la maison.*
 I am at/to the house
 ‘I am at the house.’
- c. *Son rendez-vous est à huit heures.*
 his appointment is at/to eight hours
 ‘His appointment is at 8 am.’
- d. *À demain!*
 at/to tomorrow
 ‘See you tomorrow!’
- e. *C’ est à Emma.*
 it is at/to Emma
 ‘It is Emma’s.’

- f. *une femme aux cheveux blonds*
 a woman at/to.the hair blond
 ‘a blond-haired woman’
- g. *C’ est une machine à laver.*
 it is a machine at/to wash
 ‘It is a washing machine.’
- h. *J’ ai donné un livre à Emma.*
 I have given a book at/to Emma
 ‘I gave Emma a book.’
- i. *Elle a commencé à travailler.*
 she has begun at/to work
 ‘She began to work.’
- j. *Il écrit encore à la machine.*
 he writes still at/to the machine
 ‘He still typewrites.’
- k. *Il a reçu Emma à bras ouverts.*
 he has received Emma at/to arms open
 ‘He received Emma with open arms.’

The original meaning from which all the other senses of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ diachronically derive is the spatial notion of DIRECTION, illustrated in (29a). The spatial notion of POSITION, which directly derives from the one of DIRECTION, is exemplified in (29b). The data given in (29c) and (29d) respectively illustrate the notions of TEMPORAL POSITION and of TEMPORAL DIRECTION that can be associated with *à* ‘at/to’. The sentences in (29e) and (29f) respectively exemplify the expression of POSSESSION and the one of ATTRIBUTE, which, according to Kilroe (1987), both derive from the notion of DIRECTION. The sentence in (29g) illustrates *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of the notion of GOAL. In the compound noun *machine à laver* ‘washing machine’, *à* ‘at/to’ specifies the

type of machine it is by introducing the purpose of the machine (i.e., to wash). Kilroe (1987) claims that two grammatical uses of *à* ‘at/to’ derive from the notion of GOAL: its use as a marker of the dative case (29h) and as an introducing element of infinitives (29i). Kilroe (1987) also argues that the notion of POSITION led to the expression of MEANS/INSTRUMENT, which in turn led to the expression of MANNER. The preposition *à* ‘at/to’ still expresses MEANS/INSTRUMENT (29j) and MANNER (29k), but, usually, as part of a lexicalized phrase, such as *à la machine* ‘with a typewriter’ or *à bras ouverts* ‘with open arms’. These phrases can be characterized as lexicalized as the insertion of any other word in the phrase leads to their low acceptability (e.g., *?à la grande machine à écrire* ‘with a big typewriter’; *?à grands bras ouverts* ‘with big open arms’)⁴.

Although a complete review of the grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’ would be necessary to account for how the various senses and uses of the preposition illustrated in (29) have derived from one another, I will only focus on the evolution of two notions that are particularly relevant to the current study: the notion of POSITION (see Chapters 5 and 6) and the notion of GOAL (see Chapters 4 and 6).

The etymon of the modern French preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is the Latin preposition AD ‘toward’, which is assumed to have been the result of the grammaticalization of an adverb of movement encoding the notion of direction towards (Vincent 1999).

The Latin case system itself is actually claimed to result from the grammaticalization of spatial prepositions, and the use of adverbs became necessary to

⁴ Note that means, instrument and manner *à* ‘at/to’ prepositional phrases are quite common in modern French and that some of them are semi-lexicalized (e.g., *laver à l’eau chaude/froide* ‘to wash in hot/cold water’, but **laver à de l’eau chaude* ‘to wash with some hot water’).

disambiguate the senses of the cases (Lindsay 1894). For instance, if the ablative case expressed the general sense of ORIGIN, some adverbs/prepositions were used to specify the abstract expression of origin (e.g., DE ‘down from’ vs. EX ‘out of’ vs. AB ‘away from’). Bréal (1897) accounts for the switch from adverbs to prepositions, and eventually, the loss of cases through the Law of Specialization, that is, the need to specify the general sense of a grammatical case. He argues that speakers reanalyzed the adverbs preceding nominal phrases as what triggers the use of the case, which has led to their recategorization as prepositions, in the sense that they became fixed elements introducing nominal phrases marked by a case.

The original meaning of the preposition AD ‘toward’ expressed APPROXIMATION and was therefore closely related to the concrete spatial meaning expressed by the adverb from which it had been grammaticalized. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the notion of APPROXIMATION expresses the motion of the Trajector, following a path represented by the arrow, toward the Landmark, without specifying that the Trajector reaches the Landmark. Note that the original meaning of AD ‘toward’ expressing APPROXIMATION is no longer expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ in modern French, but by the preposition *vers* ‘toward’ (see section 3.2.1).

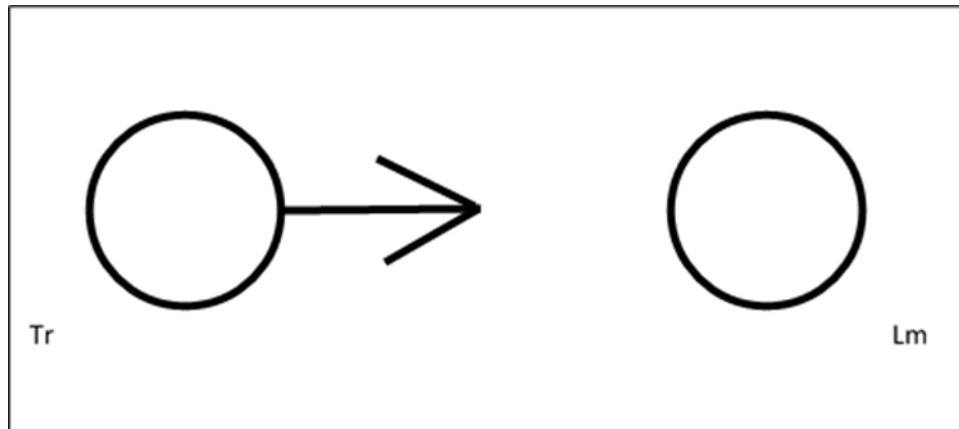


Figure 3.2: Schematization of the notion of APPROXIMATION

The notion of APPROXIMATION was soon associated with the sense of “goal of motion” and “limit of motion” (Kilroe 1987: 107), that is, the notion of DIRECTION. As illustrated in Figure 3.3, the notion of DIRECTION expresses the motion of the Trajector, following a path represented by the arrow, which ends with the Trajector reaching the Landmark.

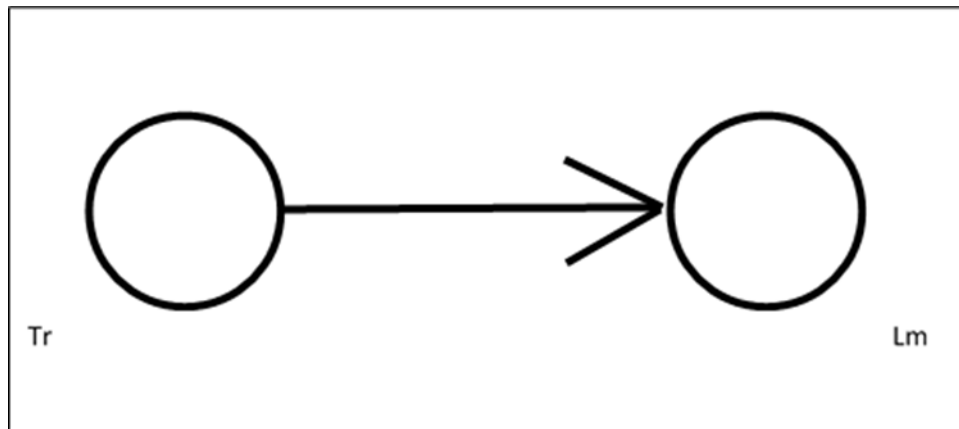


Figure 3.3: Schematization of the notion of DIRECTION

The spatial notion of DIRECTION was the conceptual basis for another spatial notion, the one of POSITION, that is, of static localization (i.e., ‘at’), represented in Figure 3.4. The notion of POSITION localizes the Trajector in relation to the Landmark and does not entail any motion. The use of AD to express the notion of POSITION is exemplified in phrases such as AD URBEM ESSE ‘to be near/at the city’ or AD FLUMEN ESSE ‘to be near/at the river’. In these examples, the expression of DIRECTION is lost in favor of the expression of a static localization, due to the semantics of static verbs. This use of AD was actually in competition with the preposition APUD ‘at/near’ in Classical Latin, which was eventually supplanted by AD in Vulgar Latin (Grandgent 1962).

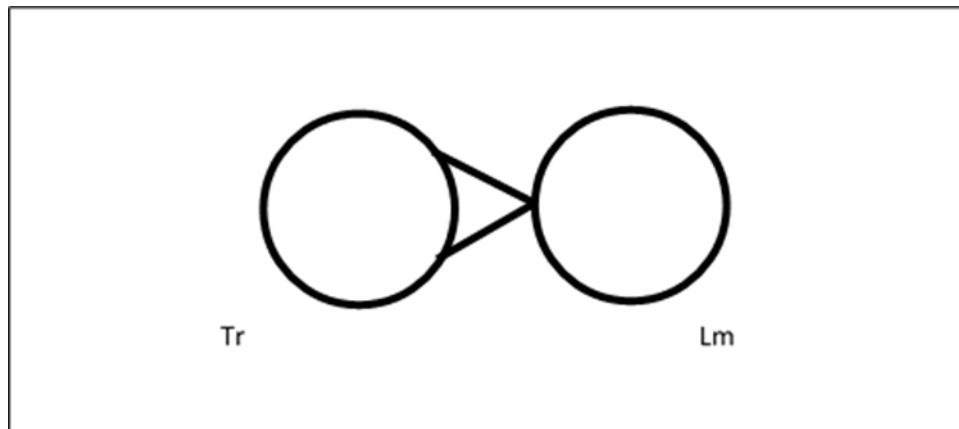


Figure 3.4: Schematization of the notion of POSITION

As a spatial preposition, modern French *à* ‘at/to’ exhibits characteristics that tend to support the assumption of a significant desemanticization of its spatial sense (Ruwet 1982). As observed by Melis (2001), the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is a general localizer

that does not imply any topological dimensions. A sentence such as *Il est à l'école* 'He is at school' does not necessarily imply the subject *il* 'he' is inside the school.

Vandeloise (1987) argues that, as a spatial preposition, *à* 'at/to' only expresses a static localization that is anticipated when used with some motion verbs (e.g., *arriver* 'to arrive'), as illustrated in (30) and (31):

(30) *Il est arrivé à la fontaine.*
 he is arrived at/to the fountain
 'He arrived at the fountain.'

(31)a. *?Il a marché à la fontaine.*
 he has walked at/to the fountain
 'He walked to the fountain.'

b. *Il a marché jusqu'à la fontaine.*
 he has walked until the fountain
 'He walked to the fountain.'

In (30), the verb *arriver* 'to arrive' entails a final destination and the localization 'he was at the fountain' can be anticipated. In (31), the verb *marcher* 'to walk' does not presuppose any final destination. The low acceptability of (31a), as compared to (31b), shows that in this context *à* 'at/to' cannot express the goal of motion. The expression of the goal of motion requires a more specific preposition, for instance, *jusqu'à* 'until', as illustrated in (31b). The use of *à* 'at/to' with motion verbs thus depends on a presupposed, anticipated localization and the notion of movement associated with *arriver* 'to arrive' and *marcher* 'to walk' is not a sufficient condition for using the preposition *à* 'at/to'. It can therefore be argued that the spatial concrete sense of direction (goal of motion) associated to AD 'to' has been lost in modern French. With verbs of motion, *à* 'at/to' only expresses spatial localization, and the notion of goal of motion is only

conveyed if it is expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb, as in the case of *arriver* ‘to arrive’.

The notion of DIRECTION was also the conceptual basis for the extension of a new sense, the expression of GOAL, either by metaphor (see Lakoff 1993: 220 “purposes are destinations”) or by metonymy (Cuyckens 2002; see section 3.2.1). It should be noted that this extension of meaning is productive in many languages as numerous cross-linguistic data show a general tendency for the use of allatives as the expression of GOAL (see Heine et al. 1991). The notion of GOAL expresses an abstract orientation of the Trajector toward an endpoint, the Landmark, illustrated in Figure 3.5, in which the Trajector follows an abstract path, represented by the dashed arrow, toward the Landmark. Unlike the notion of DIRECTION, the path does not represent a concrete motion, but represents a metaphorical motion toward what constitutes the goal.

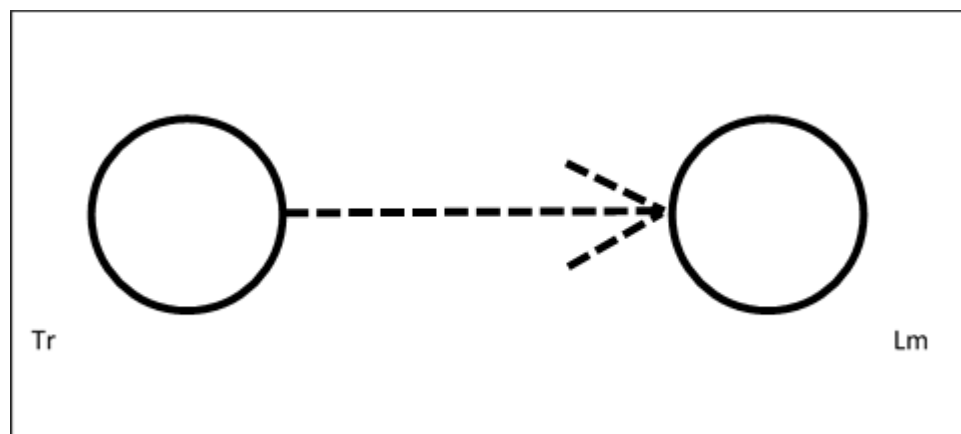


Figure 3.5: Schematization of the notion of GOAL

The sense of goal associated with AD ‘to’ in Latin as early as the 5th century BC, was also one of the senses of the preposition *a* ‘at/to’ in Old French but has been weakened throughout the evolution of the French language (Kilroe 1987). As of the 16th century, *à* ‘at/to’ enters in competition with the preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ to express purpose (Gougenheim 1959: 7). In modern French, the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ can still express purpose, but in a more abstract way than *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’, as shown in (32) and (33):

- (32)a. *Elle s’ est préparée au malheur.*
 she herself is prepared at/to.the misfortune
 ‘She prepared herself for misfortune.’
- b. ?*Elle s’ est préparée pour le malheur.*
 she herself is prepared for the misfortune
 ‘She prepared herself for misfortune.’
- (33)a. ?*Elle s’ est préparée au bal.*
 she herself is prepared at/to.the ball
 ‘She prepared herself for the ball.’
- b. *Elle s’ est préparée pour le bal.*
 she herself is prepared for the ball
 ‘She prepared herself for the ball.’

Spang-Hanssen (1963) observes that *à* ‘at/to’ tends to introduce abstract complements, as *malheur* ‘misfortune’ in (32a), whereas *pour* tends to be used with concrete complements, as *bal* ‘ball’ in (33b)⁵. Spang-Hanssen (1963) claims that, with *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’, the expression of goal is more explicit and specific than with *à* ‘at/to’. There are indeed restrictions on the use of *à* ‘at/to’ to express goals, as illustrated in (34):

⁵ Note that this analysis is not systematic and only reflects a tendency.

- (34)a. *Il est parti en vacances pour se reposer.*
 he is left in vacation for himself to rest
 'He went on vacation to rest.'
- b. *?Il est parti en vacances à se reposer.*
 he is left in vacation at/to himself to rest
 'He went on vacation to rest.'

In (34a), the preposition *pour* 'for/(in order) to' introduces a goal adverbial *pour se reposer* 'in order to rest'. In contrast to *pour* 'for/(in order) to', the semantics of *à* 'at/to' is too abstract to clearly express a goal, which leads to the low acceptability of (34b). The preposition *à* 'at/to' is only used to express goals in limited contexts, such as the one in (32a) (see Spang-Hanssen 1963).

This partial review of the grammaticalization of *à* 'at/to' shows not only how the notions of POSITION and GOAL are derived from the notion of DIRECTION, but also that these notions have undergone a significant dessemanticization. As a spatial preposition, *à* 'at/to' no longer expresses the notion of DIRECTION in modern French (Vandeloise 1987) and expresses the notion of POSITION in a more abstract fashion than other spatial prepositions (see Melis 2001). Similarly, the notion of GOAL that *à* 'at/to' expresses in modern French is more abstract than the one expressed by the preposition *pour* 'for/(in order) to'.

3.2.3. Grammaticalization and prototype-based polysemic networks

In a study comparing grammaticalization and synchronic polysemic networks based on prototypes, Mudler (2001) observes several common points between the two approaches, notably the role played by expressivity and efficiency and that played by

metaphor and metonymy in the relatedness of senses. The similarities between the two approaches may cast doubt on the synchronic relevance of prototype-based polysemic networks, as these networks are often similar to the networks used to represent the grammaticalization of a form, that is, grammaticalization chains (see section 3.2.1). If one were to represent a prototype-based polysemic network of the senses of *à* ‘at/to’, it would certainly be very similar to the grammaticalization chain of *à* ‘at/to’ represented in Figure 3.1 (see section 3.2.2), given that, as noted by Mudler (2001), the cognitive processes used to justify the relatedness of senses are often the same at both the synchronic and diachronic levels.

In their model of principled polysemy (see section 2.3.3), Tyler & Evans (2003) assume that the grammatical uses of a spatial preposition directly or indirectly derive from the spatial configuration of the preposition. As aptly observed by Sweetser (1988), however, the semantic motivation that diachronically leads to the formation of a grammatical marker is not necessarily present in the speaker’s mind and the form is usually viewed as part of a system in a given syntactic/pragmatic environment. In the case of *à* ‘at/to’, for instance, one might wonder whether the use of the preposition as a dative marker is perceived as related to the other senses of *à* ‘at/to’ or simply viewed as a systematic form.

Furthermore, Tyler & Evans (2003) argue that the prototype of the polysemic networks representing the semantics of a preposition should be the original spatial meaning of the preposition. The choice of the original spatial meaning as the prototype

may, however, be problematic, as observed by Luraghi (2003) in her study on cases and prepositions in Ancient Greek:

To say that the abstract meaning of grammatical forms derives from an original spatial meaning does not mean that the spatial meaning is synchronically available as their ‘basic’ meaning: rather, following the theory of grammaticalization, one must assume that grammatical forms originated from earlier lexical items with a concrete, spatial meaning. Such a view in turn necessarily implies the integration of a diachronic dimension in the analysis of meaning. (Luraghi 2003: 12)

In this quotation, Luraghi (2003) indirectly questions Tyler & Evans’s (2003) approach to use the original spatial meaning of a preposition as its prototypical meaning. In some cases, the original spatial meaning may indeed not be available at the synchronic level, even though it may be the most predominant sense in the polysemic network (see section 2.3.3). In fact, according to Vandeloise (1987) (see section 3.2.2), it can be claimed that the original meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of directionality is no longer available in modern French, since the spatial senses of the preposition are fundamentally static.

The second point made by Luraghi (2003) in the quotation above concerns the overall importance of the diachronic dimension in the semantic analysis of prepositions. Understanding the relatedness of the various senses of a preposition at the synchronic level undoubtedly requires understanding how these senses are related from a diachronic viewpoint. Heine (1992), for instance, demonstrates that grammaticalization chains can account for the family resemblance observed synchronically between the various senses of a form that has been grammaticalized.

As the goal of my study is not to determine whether the polysemic networks are synchronically relevant or are a mere reflection of grammaticalization chains, I will not

take side on this epistemological issue. However, in order to provide sound semantic representations of the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations, I will use the concept of family resemblance as the basis of my semantic analysis (see section 2.3). In other words, the semantic representations that I offer for *à* ‘at/to’ in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will systematically show family resemblance with other senses of *à* ‘at/to’, given that the concept of family resemblance is central to both the theories of prototype-based polysemic networks and grammaticalization. Furthermore, since in these two theoretical frameworks it is assumed that the more abstract senses of a preposition derive from a more concrete sense, either synchronically (Tyler & Evans 2003) or diachronically, I systematically base the abstract semantic representations of *à* ‘at/to’ on more concrete senses. This approach differs from the semantic analyses of *à* ‘at/to’ found in the literature, which tend to characterize the preposition in terms of core meaning, as explained in the following section.

3.3. SEMANTIC ASPECTS

In this section, I first review some of the major works dealing with the semantic characterization of *à* ‘at/to’, on whether it is meaningful or meaningless (section 3.3.1). I then focus on some studies on the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts (section 3.3.2).

3.3.1. On the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’

The claim that the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is meaningful is not entirely uncontroversial. Given its numerous uses (see section 3.1) and senses (see section 3.2.2),

it has often been characterized in the literature as “empty” (see Vendryes 1921), that is, void of meaning. Melis (2001: 84) suggests that a preposition is generally defined as empty if: its use is only conditioned by syntax; its interpretation can be contextually deduced; its meaning is very abstract and general; it has so many senses that it is impossible to provide a unified representation of its meaning. Although the list of criteria proposed by Melis (2001) summarizes most of the properties usually assigned to “empty” (or functional; see section 3.1.1) prepositions, it also implies divergent views on the meaning of these prepositions, namely, the difference between “empty” and “colorless” (see von Wartburg & Zumthor 1958) prepositions, that is, between prepositions that are considered meaningless and those that are characterized as having an abstract meaning.

In the literature, some authors characterize the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ as being strictly meaningless (Blinkenberg 1960; Boer 1926; Brunot & Bruneau 1956; Séchehayé 1926). Boer (1926) claims that *à* ‘at/to’ is only used to fill a syntactic hiatus and, thereby, he restricts it to a syntactic tool used to relate various phrases. Brunot & Bruneau (1956) consider *à* ‘at/to’ as a “dead” preposition that has completely lost its original meaning. Blinkenberg (1960) characterizes *à* ‘at/to’, in verbal contexts, as a meaningless morpheme of transitivity (see section 3.1.1). These authors generally assume that the use of *à* ‘at/to’ is strictly conditioned by syntax and does not contribute semantically. This view diverges from the one that characterizes the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as abstract.

In his study of French prepositions, Spang-Hanssen (1963) demonstrates that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ is generally more abstract and less specific than other competing prepositions, such as *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ or *avec* ‘with’ (see section 3.2.2). He thereby

rejects the notion of “empty” preposition and prefers to use the term “colorless” to characterize the very abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’.

Characterizing the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ as an “abstract” preposition, Cadiot (1997) rejects the notion of “colorless” preposition since, as he argues, it presupposes that no abstract core meaning can be assigned to the preposition. Cadiot (1997) actually distinguishes between two types of polysemy: horizontal polysemy, which entails that the various senses of a form derive from a prototype (see section 2.3.2); and vertical polysemy, which implies a generic abstract core meaning from which the various senses of a form are specified contextually. Using the vertical polysemy approach, Cadiot (1997) assigns a very abstract meaning to the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ that he characterizes in terms of “discontinuity/prospection” (see section 3.3.2 for a discussion of the notion of prospection). The notion of “discontinuity” refers to the fact that *à* ‘at/to’ is used to establish discontinuous relations, that is, relations that are unstable, in contrast to the preposition *de* ‘of/from’ that is used to establish continuous and stable relations. Consider examples (35) and (36):

(35)a. *De qui est-ce le frère?*
of/from who is it the brother
‘Whose brother is he?’

b. *?À qui est-ce le frère?*
at/to who is it the brother
‘Whose brother is he?’

(36)a. *À qui est-ce le stylo?*
at/to who is it the pen
‘Whose pen is it?’

- b. ?*De qui est-ce le stylo?*
 of/from who is it the pen
 ‘Whose pen is it?’

In (35) and (36), the questions aim to establish a relation of possession. In (35), the noun *frère* ‘brother’ presupposes a relation of possession; a brother is always someone’s brother. This presupposed relation can be viewed as stable and continuous, and only *de* ‘of/from’ (35a) can be used to express it, as shown by the low acceptability of (35b). In (36), the noun *stylo* ‘pen’ does not necessarily presuppose a relation of possession. The relation is consequently seen as unstable, and only *à* ‘at/to’ (36a) is acceptable to express it, as illustrated by the low acceptability of (36b). Note that Adamczewski (1991) extends this analysis to all the uses of *à* ‘at/to’ and *de* ‘of/from’ by suggesting that the opposition between the two prepositions is based on pragmatics. He argues that *à* ‘at/to’ introduces rhematic information, that is, not presupposed/new information and that *de* ‘of/from’ introduces thematic information, that is, presupposed/old information.

In contrast to the abstract core meaning that Cadiot (1997) assigns to *à* ‘at/to’, Vandeloise (1987, 1993) approaches the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ from a more concrete point of view and provides semantic rules to account for some of the uses of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. He claims, for instance, that *à* ‘at/to’ can be used to express a routine associated with the complement of the preposition, as illustrated in (37):

- (37) *Il est à l’ université.*
 he is at/to the university
 ‘He is at the university./He is in college.’

In (37), the sentence can be interpreted either as a spatial localization (i.e., ‘he is at the university’) or as the expression of a routine associated with *l’université* ‘the university’

(i.e., ‘he is in college’), that is, the fact that the subject attends college, that he is a student.

3.3.2. The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts

As seen in the previous section (section 3.3.1), when *à* ‘at/to’ is considered meaningful, there is a divergence between linguists who assume an abstract core meaning for *à* ‘at/to’ (e.g., Cadiot 1997) and those who do not (e.g., Vandeloise 1987). Concerning the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts Cadiot (1997), following Moignet (1981), claims that *à* ‘at/to’ and *de* ‘of/from’ are respectively associated with the notion of prospection and retrospection, as illustrated in (38):

- (38) a. *Je suis descendu de l’ auberge.*
 I am gone down of/from the inn
 ‘I came down from the inn.’
- b. *Je suis descendu à l’ auberge.*
 I am gone down at/to the inn
 ‘I went to the inn.’

In (38a), *de* ‘of/from’ expresses an origin and, thereby, has a retrospective value. In (38b), *à* ‘at/to’ expresses a destination and can be characterized in terms of the expression of prospection.

Marque-Pucheu (2008) notes that this semantic opposition can sometimes be questionable, since it is not systematic, as illustrated by the examples in (39) and (40):

- (39) *Je me mis à rêver aux vacances d'autrefois.*
 I myself put at/to dream at/to.the vacations quondam
 ‘I started to dream of quondam vacations.’
 (Guéhenno, Annie, *L’épreuve*, 1968: 64, Paris: Grasset)

- (40) *Néanmoins, nous passons l' hiver à soupirer après le
 nonetheless we spend the winter at/to sigh after the
 printemps, et nos périodes de travail à rêver des
 spring and our periods of/from work at/to dream of/from.the
 prochaines vacances.
 next vacations
 'Nonetheless, we spend the winter sighing after the spring, and our work periods
 dreaming of our next vacations.'
 (Gratton, Marie, *Côté cour, côté jardin. Voyage intérieur en 365 jours*, 2001: 25,
 Paris: Médiaspaul)*

In these examples, the semantic opposition between prospection and retrospection is problematic. The preposition *à* 'at/to' is used after *rêver* 'to dream' in (39), even though *vacances d'autrefois* 'quondam vacations' implies retrospection, and *de* 'of/from' is employed in (40), despite the implication of prospection in *prochaines vacances* 'next vacations'. Marque-Pucheu (2008) also observes that the notions of prospection and retrospection are too general to account for the use of *à* 'at/to' and *de* 'of/from' in such examples.

Although Marque-Pucheu (2008) shows that there are limits to a generalization of the meanings of *à* 'at/to' and *de* 'of/from', respectively, in terms of prospection and retrospection, she nonetheless demonstrates that there is a semantic affinity between the lexical semantics of the verb and the choice of the preposition. On the one hand, she shows that many verbs followed by *à* 'at/to' imply a notion of movement or transmission compatible with the sense of direction associated to the preposition (*donner quelque chose à quelqu'un* 'to give something to someone', as transmission of an object; *marier quelqu'un à quelqu'un* 'to marry someone to someone', as a movement uniting the subject to the object; *inciter quelqu'un à faire quelque chose* 'to incite someone to do

something’, as a movement targeting a result). On the other hand, she argues that some verbs are compatible with the positional sense of *à* ‘at/to’, such as *assister à* ‘to attend’, which implies the coincidence of the subject with the object.

Marque-Pucheu (2008) bases her analysis on the two main senses that Gougenheim (1959) suggests for *à* ‘at/to’, the dynamic and static senses, which he respectively associates with the directional and positional senses of *à* ‘at/to’. He argues that the dynamic sense of *à* ‘at/to’ is illustrated in pairs such as the one in (41):

- (41) a. *Ils ont applaudi la décision (à contre-cœur).*
 they have applauded the decision reluctantly
 ‘They applauded the decision (reluctantly).’
 b. *Ils ont applaudi à la décision ?(à contre-cœur).*
 they have applauded at/to the decision reluctantly
 ‘They approved of the decision ?(reluctantly).’

Gougenheim (1959) claims that the subject is more actively involved in the indirect transitive construction (41b) than in the direct transitive construction (41a). In relation to the objet, the subject is indeed more involved in (41b) in which there is approval of the decision, as shown by the low acceptability of the use of the adverbial *à contre-cœur* ‘reluctantly’. In (41a), the direct construction does not necessarily entail approval, as demonstrated by the possibility of using the adverbial *à contre-cœur* ‘reluctantly’.

Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995), following Gougenheim (1959), also argue that the subject is more actively involved in the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ than in the direct one, as shown in (42):

- (42) a. *Il a touché sa cuisse par mégarde.*
 he has touched her thigh by inadvertence
 ‘He touched her thigh inadvertently.’

- b. ?*Il a touché à sa cuisse par mégarde.*
 he has touched at/to her thigh by inadvertence
 ‘He touched her thigh inadvertently.’

As observed by the authors, the indirect construction implies intentionality on the part of the subject. The use of the adverbial expression *par mégarde* ‘inadvertently’ is thereby incompatible with the underlying meaning of intentionality associated to the indirect construction (42b), which is not the case for the direct construction in (42a). Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) argue that the core meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be described as an “abstract path toward a goal” (1996: 367). They demonstrate that this core meaning can be applied to other constructions presenting an alternation (43):

- (43)a. *Il s’empresse à satisfaire sa femme.*
 he himself hurries at/to satisfy his wife
 ‘He strives to satisfy his wife.’
- b. *Il s’empresse de fermer la fenêtre.*
 he himself hurries of/from close the window
 ‘He hurries to close the window.’

In (43a), *s’empresser* means “to do something enthusiastically” (Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996: 366) and, in (43b), *s’empresser* receives the meaning of “to hurry to do something” (Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996: 366), hence the notion of intentionality is present in (43a) but absent in (43b).

Although this core meaning can be found in some of the uses of *à* ‘at/to’, it cannot be systematically applied to all of its uses. Consider the example in (44):

- (44) *L’arrière de la maison touche à l’hôpital.*
 the back of/from the house touches at/to the hospital
 ‘The back of the house touches the hospital.’

In (44), the notion of intentionality is completely absent from the indirect construction, since intent cannot be attributed to an inanimate object such as the back of the house. It also appears difficult to characterize the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in this context as expressing a “path toward a goal”, especially as it refers to a static spatial relationship.

This last example shows that it appears difficult to use a monosemic approach to characterize the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in verbal contexts. Following Marque-Pucheu (2008), I assume not only that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ shows semantic affinity with the lexical semantics of the verb, but also that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ may vary from verb to verb.

3.4. SUMMARY

In section 3.1, I presented the main syntactic and morphosyntactic properties of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ and, following Herslund (1988), demonstrated that there are three types of indirect objects introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ in French: locatives, neutrals and datives.

In section 3.2, after defining the basic assumptions of the theory of grammaticalization, I partially reviewed Kilroe’s (1987) study on the grammaticalization of *à* ‘at/to’, in order to illustrate the various synchronic senses of *à* ‘at/to’ and how they are related diachronically. I focused on the grammaticalization of two relevant senses to the current study: the expressions of position and goal. After discussing the numerous similarities between the theory of grammaticalization and the prototype-based polysemic network approach, which can cast doubt on the synchronic reality of the latter, I claimed that my semantic analyses should be based on two general principles common to the two

approaches: the various senses of *à* ‘at/to’ need to exhibit family resemblance (see Wittgenstein 1953) and the more abstract senses need to be viewed as deriving from the more concrete senses.

In section 3.3, I reviewed the literature dealing with the semantic characterization of *à* ‘at/to’. I showed that, while some linguists view it as meaningless, others consider it as meaningful, either in a very abstract way (e.g., Cadiot 1997) or in more specific ways (e.g., Vandeloise 1987). After showing the limits of assigning an abstract core meaning to *à* ‘at/to’, especially in verbal contexts, I assumed that analyzing the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations requires characterizing different meanings for *à* ‘at/to’, depending on the semantic differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of a given verb or set of verbs. With some verbs, the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ will be characterized in terms of expression of an abstract goal (see Chapter 4). With others, it will be described in terms of expression of an abstract localization (see Chapter 5). For the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, I will show that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be both analyzed as the expressions of an abstract goal and of an abstract localization, depending on the senses of the verb (see Chapter 6).

Chapter 4: À ‘at/to’ and the Expression of Goal in Argument Alternations

In this chapter, I focus on cases of argument alternations for which the meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of each verb can be accounted for in terms of goal. I demonstrate that these meaning differences result from the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal, which is encoded in the indirect transitive constructions of the verbs.

In section 4.1, I provide the theoretical assumptions with which I specify the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal and suggest a model to account for the way the meaning is encoded in the indirect transitive construction. Then, I provide a semantic characterization, a corpus analysis and a semantic analysis of each of the verbs or verb classes showing cases of argument alternations for which *à* ‘at/to’ has a semantic import that can be characterized in terms of goal, that is, *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ (section 4.2); *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ (section 4.3); *voir* ‘to see/to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to look at/to pay attention to’ (section 4.4); *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ (section 4.5); the pro-eventive verb class (section 4.6) and *viser* ‘to aim’ (section 4.7). Finally, I summarize the main findings of this chapter in section 4.8.

4.1. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

4.1.1. À ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal

As discussed in section 3.2.2, the Latin spatial preposition AD ‘toward/to’, the etymon of *à* ‘at/to’, starts to express the notion of goal as of the 5th century (see Vincent 1999). The extension of meaning is assumed to result from a metaphorical shift from the more concrete spatial domain to the more abstract one of goal (Kilroe 1987). As of the 16th century, the French preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ enters in competition with *à* ‘at/to’ to introduce adverbial goal clauses (Gougenheim 1959). In contemporary French, *à* ‘at/to’ can no longer introduce adverbial goal clauses and is claimed to express the notion of goal in a less specific and more abstract fashion than the preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ (Spang-Hanssen 1963; see section 3.2.2).

The semantic value of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of abstract goal has been argued in the literature to be the core meaning of the preposition. As discussed in section 3.3.2, Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) suggest that the core meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be described as an “abstract path toward a goal” (1996: 367) and Moignet (1981) and Cadiot (1997) relate the use of *à* ‘at/to’ to the notion of prospection, which can be viewed as a temporal entailment of the notion of goal. Although the uses of *à* ‘at/to’ cannot all be characterized in terms of goal (see section 3.3.2 and chapters 5, 6 and 7), there are still numerous instances in which *à* ‘at/to’ expresses an abstract goal in contemporary French (see, among others, Cadiot 1997; Gougenheim 1959; Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996; Moignet 1981; Spang-Hanssen 1963).

For its uses as the expression of an abstract goal, I define \dot{a} ‘at/to’ as the orientation of a Trajector, following an abstract path, toward a Landmark that constitutes an abstract endpoint. This definition is represented in Figure 4.1.

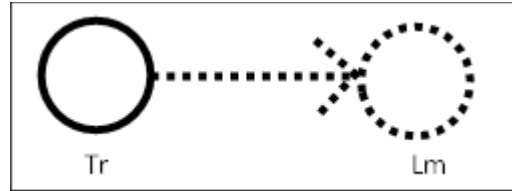


Figure 4.1: Schematic representation of \dot{a} ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal

In Figure 4.1, the Trajector is oriented toward the abstract endpoint, the abstract goal, which constitutes the Landmark (the dashed circle) and follows an abstract path (the dashed arrow). The dashes thus symbolize an abstract characterization of the components of the schematization of the meaning of \dot{a} ‘at/to’, that is, an abstract path, following Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996), as well as an abstract Landmark.

My characterization of the notion of goal as abstract reflects the difference in how the prepositions *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ and \dot{a} ‘at/to’ in the present context of argument alternations express the notion of goal. While the preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ expresses the notion of goal in a more specific way, \dot{a} ‘at/to’ expresses it in a more schematic, more abstract fashion, and consequently stands closer to the grammatical meaning pole than *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ in the lexical/grammatical meanings continuum (see section 2.1.1). In contrast to the notion of goal (see section 3.2.2), the

notion of abstract goal expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ entails an abstract Landmark, which is interpreted in a less specific and more abstract way.

The abstract characterization of the Landmark associated with *à* ‘at/to’ also tends to capture some of the morphosyntactic properties observed with the indirect transitive constructions of the verbs under scrutiny in this chapter, namely, a low compatibility with concrete nominal phrases⁶, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. *Il aspire à l’ attaque/ ?à Emma/ ?à la table.*
 he aspires at/to the attack at/to Emma at/to the table
 ‘He aspires to attack/?to Emma/?to the table.’
- b. *Il pare à l’ attaque/ ?à Emma/ ?à la table.*
 he wards off at/to the attack at/to Emma at/to the table
 ‘He guards against the attack/Emma/?the table.’
- c. *Il veille à l’ attaque/ ?à Emma/ ?à la table.*
 he watches at/to the attack at/to Emma at/to the table
 ‘He sees to the attack/Emma/the table.’
- d. *Il encourage à l’ attaque/ ?à Emma/ ?à la table.*
 he encourages at/to the attack at/to Emma at/to the table
 ‘He encourages the attack/Emma/?the table.’
- e. *Il vise à l’ attaque/ ?à Emma/ ?à la table.*
 he aims at/to the attack at/to Emma at/to the table
 ‘He aims to attack/at Emma/at the table.’

The examples given in (1) show that the indirect constructions of the verbs *aspirer* ‘to aspire’ (1a), *parer* ‘to guard against’ (1b), *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ (1c), *encourager* ‘to encourage’ (1d) and *viser* ‘to aim’ (1e) are not compatible with concrete individuated

⁶ Langacker (2008) argues that grammatical categories can be given a uniform semantic characterization. He claims, for instance, that nouns can be schematized as [THING]. I assume that a distinction can be made between [CONCRETE THING] and [ABSTRACT THING] and that, due to its abstract characterization, that is, its lack of specificity in expressing the notion of goal, the Landmark tends to be more compatible with [ABSTRACT THING] nouns.

animates (*Emma* ‘Emma’) or inanimates (*la table* ‘the table’). The semantic characterization of the Landmark as an abstract goal thus appears to influence the type of complements that it can integrate, as well as the meaning of the complement (see sections 4.2–4.7).

The abstract semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ is characteristic of grammatical markers (see Langacker 2008: 22), and as such, can be viewed as grammatical meaning, that is, meaning that is highly schematic and little specific at the semantic pole, in opposition to lexical meaning, which is little schematic and highly specific (see section 2.1.1). Determining the semantic role played by *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations thus amounts to demonstrating not only how this grammatical meaning is encoded in the indirect transitive constructions, but also how the grammatical meaning and the lexical meaning of the verb interact.

4.1.2. On the interaction between grammatical and lexical meanings

As discussed in section 3.3.2, Marque-Pucheu (2008) demonstrates a general semantic affinity between the lexical semantics of the verbs followed by *à* ‘at/to’ and the abstract meanings of the preposition. The lexical meanings of the verbs therefore appear to motivate the use of the grammatical meanings expressed by *à* ‘at/to’. Consider the following example:

- (2) *Il a donné une pomme à Emma.*
 he has given an apple at/to Emma
 ‘He gave an apple to Emma.’

Marque-Pucheu (2008) notes that the lexical semantics of the verb *donner* ‘to give’ entails the notion of transfer, that is, in (2), for instance, the transfer of the object *une pomme* ‘an apple’ to the recipient *Emma*, and observes that the notion of transfer is highly compatible with the abstract meaning of direction that she assigns to *à* ‘at/to’ in this particular construction. In some way, it could be argued, following the constructionist approach (see Goldberg 1995), that the lexical semantics of the verb motivates the use of the preposition. The grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of the abstract path between the object and the recipient would thus encode the notion of transfer entailed by the lexical semantics of the verb. In the framework of Cognitive Grammar, it can be posited that the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ is required in order for the complement to be compatible with the lexical semantics of the verb. This illustrates a case in which the lexical meaning of a verb conditions the grammatical meaning associated with a given preposition.

It should however be noted that the semantic interplay between lexical and grammatical meanings is not unidirectional. Grammatical meaning can also condition the interpretation of lexical meaning. Consider the following set of examples in English:

- (3) a. He looked for his keys.
 b. He looked at his keys.
 c. He looked for the song on his radio transistor.
 d. ?He looked at the song on his radio transistor.

The meaning of the verbal complex *look for* can be viewed as a composite of the lexical meaning of *to look*, that is, directing one’s gaze, and the grammatical meaning of the preposition *for*, which expresses the notion of purpose (3a). The composite structure *to*

look for entails an implicit goal, that is, in (3a), “to find his keys”. This implicit goal can be claimed to result from the grammatical meaning of *for*, as it is not found in the constructions of the verb *to look* with the preposition *at*, for instance, as in (3b). Furthermore, the lexical meaning of *to look* when followed by *for* somehow differs from when it is followed by other prepositions. In (3c), it seems difficult to define *look* as the subject’s directing his gaze toward the object *the song*. When *to look* is followed by *for*, the notion of visual perception found in the lexical meaning of the verb when followed by *at*, for instance, is partially lost. In contrast to the acceptability of (3c), the low acceptability of (3d) results from the semantic incongruity of the lexical meaning of *to look* when followed by *at*, which entails visual perception, and the semantics of the object *the song*.

The interaction between the lexical meaning and grammatical meanings thus turns out to be of a dual nature. As much as the lexical meaning of a verb can condition the use of the grammatical meaning of a preposition, the grammatical meaning of a preposition can condition the interpretation of the lexical meaning of a verb. On the one hand, the lexical meaning of a verb can condition or implicate the grammatical meaning of a preposition (see Beavers 2009; Gawron 1986 and section 2.2.2). On the other hand, the grammatical meaning of a preposition can condition the interpretation of the lexical meaning of the verb when it is followed by this preposition, in contrast to the potential different interpretation(s) of the lexical meaning(s) of this verb in other constructions. The semantic interplay between lexical meaning and grammatical meaning is a matter of degrees and can be represented through a continuum defined by two opposite poles. One

pole represents instances in which the grammatical meaning of the preposition conditions the interpretation of the lexical meaning in such a way that lexical meaning of the verb mirrors the grammatical meaning of the preposition. The other pole represents cases in which the grammatical meaning of the preposition mirrors the lexical meaning of the verb that conditions its use. At the intermediate levels stand cases for which the grammatical and lexical meanings do not mirror each other and for which the semantic interaction is neutral, that is, cases for which the meaning of the structure is purely a composite of grammatical and lexical meanings.

The continuum of the interaction between grammatical and lexical meanings can actually be used to account for the way the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal interacts with the lexical meaning of the verbs under scrutiny in this chapter (see Figure 4.2). The cases of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ and *viser* ‘to aim’ exemplify the two opposite poles, that is, respectively, the one for which the lexical meaning mirrors the grammatical meaning and the one for which the grammatical meaning mirrors the lexical meaning. With *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’, the lexical meaning of the verb in the indirect construction (i.e., *aspirer à* ‘to aspire’) expresses the notion of goal, which is totally absent in the lexical meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction (i.e., *aspirer* ‘to breathe in’). With *viser* ‘to aim’, the lexical meaning of the verb in both the direct and indirect constructions express the notion of goal, conditioning the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of abstract goal. The other verbs stand at different points on the continuum, with the cases of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ illustrating the neutral interaction of grammatical and

lexical meanings. The lexical semantics of these two verbs remain the same in the various constructions in which they appear. In the following sections, I justify and explain the positioning of each verb in the continuum.

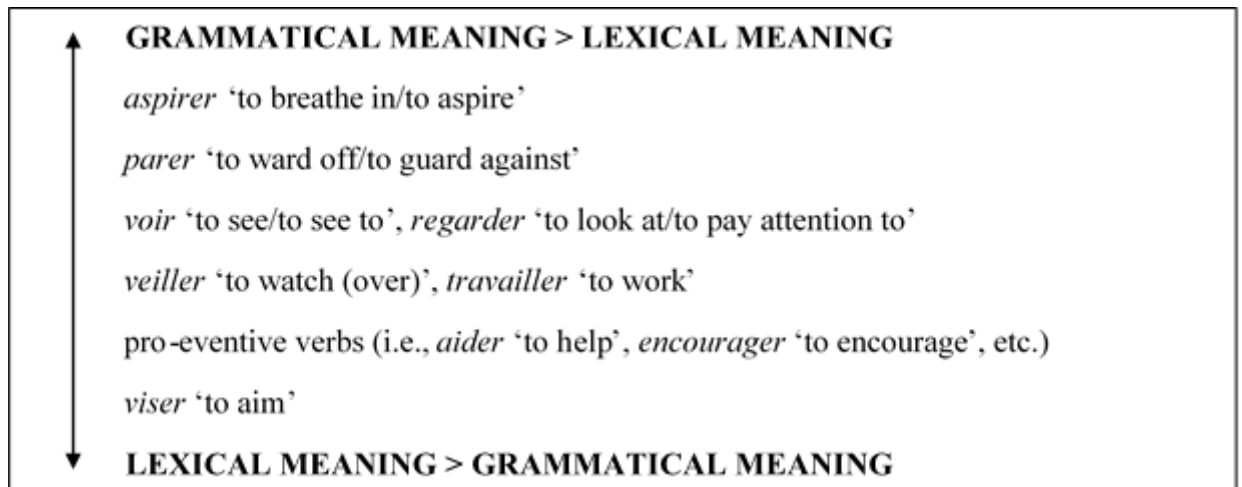


Figure 4.2: Grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum

4.2. *ASPIRER* 'TO BREATHE IN/TO ASPIRE'

4.2.1. Semantic characterization

The lexeme *aspirer* 'to breathe in/to aspire' presents a case of direct/indirect transitive alternation that illustrates one of the poles of the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum, that is, the pole for which the lexical meaning of the verb mirrors the grammatical meaning of the preposition. As illustrated in (4), there is a significant divergence of meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions:

- (4) a. *Il aspire l' air.*
 he breathes in the air.
 'He breathes in the air.'

- b. *Il aspire à la perfection.*
he aspires at/to the perfection
'He aspires to perfection.'

When used with the direct transitive construction (4a), *aspirer* means 'to breathe in' and does not entail the notion of goal. On the other hand, with the indirect transitive construction (4b), *aspirer* means 'to aspire' and the notion of goal is part of the lexical semantics of the verb. The indirect objects of *aspirer* 'to aspire', such as *à la perfection* 'to perfection' in (4b), can indeed be characterized as a goal that the subject desires to reach. With *aspirer à* 'to aspire', the lexical meaning of the verb appears to mirror the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to', that is, the notion of abstract goal it expresses.

The significant divergence of meaning between the two constructions raises the question of whether the alternation between the direct and indirect constructions should be viewed as a case of polysemy or homonymy, that is, whether there is a single lexeme to which the two senses are linked or a different lexeme for each construction. Lexicographers consider the meaning of the indirect construction to be a figurative extension of the meaning of the direct construction (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 8^e édition). Without empirical evidence, however, it seems difficult to determine whether the figurative meaning extension is a real synchronic process, that is, whether the speakers view the two senses as being related and derive one sense from the other. From an etymological viewpoint, the meaning of the indirect construction is indeed a figurative extension of the meaning of the direct construction (*TLFi*). However, as discussed in section 2.3.2, although the etymological criterion is necessary, it is not always sufficient to determine cases of polysemy at the synchronic level (Lyons 1977).

One argument supporting a homonymic treatment of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ is the fact that each sense appears to be lexically specific, that is, that for each construction, the verb has a specific lexical meaning. This point can be illustrated with an example of lexical derivation. The noun *aspirant* ‘aspirant’ directly derives from the meaning of the verb in the indirect construction (*TLFi*) and is not semantically related to the meaning of the verb in the direct construction. If *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ was a single lexeme from which the senses of ‘breathing in’ and ‘aspiring’ was derived, it should be expected that all the words that lexically derive from this single lexeme also present a similar case of polysemy, that is, that all the derived words would also be polysemous. An example of such a case is the French verb *courir*, which either means ‘to run’, and in some specific contexts, ‘to chase after’ as in *Il court les filles* ‘He chases after girls’. The lexically derived noun *coureur* is similarly polysemic and can either mean ‘runner’ or ‘philanderer’. The fact that *aspirant* ‘aspirant’ is only related to the sense of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’ supports the view that the two senses are lexically specific and that we are dealing with two lexemes rather than a single one.

Viewing polysemy as a continuum between the vague and homonymy (see section 2.3.2), it can be argued that the polysemy of the lexeme *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ is close to the pole of homonymy. Such a characterization does not exclude the potential perceived relatedness of the two senses and accounts for the divergence of meaning between the two senses and their lexical specification, which can be argued to result from a diachronic process of semantic reanalysis. The use of the indirect construction is first attested in the 14th century (*TLFi*), at a time when the Old French

preposition *a* ‘at/to’ explicitly expressed the notion of goal (see section 3.2.2; Kilroe 1987). It can thereby be argued that the original meaning of *aspirer a* ‘to breathe in for something’ was figurative and that the figurative meaning of the construction has been semantically reanalyzed into ‘to aspire’. In other words, the original lexical meaning ‘to breathe in’ has been lost in favor of the notion of goal expressed by *a* ‘at/to’ and the notion of goal has been reanalyzed as being expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb. The semantic reanalysis of the construction can explain why the noun *aspirant* ‘aspirant’, which emerged in the 15th century (*TLFi*), is only related to the sense of the indirect transitive construction of the verb as it was directly derived from the reanalyzed lexical meaning of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’.

The case of the direct/indirect transitive alternation of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ clearly shows the semantic import of the preposition *à* as the expression of goal. At the diachronic level, the notion of goal, originally expressed by the preposition, has been incorporated into the lexical semantics of the verb. At the synchronic level, the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ expresses the grammatical meaning of abstract goal, as shown by the types of objects compatible with the indirect transitive use of the verb *aspirer* ‘to aspire’.

4.2.2. Corpus analysis

As seen in section 4.1, the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal has a low level of compatibility with concrete individuated nominal phrases. As a component of the symbolization of abstract goal, the Landmark configured

by *à* ‘at/to’ is viewed as highly abstract and, as such, tends not to be incorporated by structures referring to concrete entities (see Table 4.1).

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	238	48.47%
Animate	2	0.40%
Inanimate Concrete	13	2.65%
Inanimate Abstract	223	45.42%
Action	68	13.85%
Non-action	155	31.57%
Infinitival Phrase	251	51.12%
Finite-tensed Clauses	2	0.41%
TOTAL	491	100%

Table 4.1: Complementation types of *aspirer à* ‘to aspire’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

Table 4.1 shows the types of objects compatible with *aspirer à* ‘to aspire’ in the 20th century texts from the *ARTFL* corpus. Most of the complements are infinitival phrases (51.12%) and inanimate abstract nominal phrases (45.42%).

Among the 15 occurrences of concrete nominal phrases found in the corpus, two are animate (*à cette femme* ‘to this woman’; *au sauveur* ‘to the savior’) and 13 inanimate. As illustrated in (5) and (6), the concrete nominal phrases are stylistically marked and used in a figurative fashion:

- (5) a. *Je ne sais quoi de mystérieux, de providentiel m'*
 I not know what of/from mysterious of/from providential me
interdit d' aspirer à cette femme.
 forbids of/from to aspire at/to this woman
 'I do not know what mystery, providence forbids me from aspiring to this woman.'
- (Hermant, Abel, *Monsieur de Courpière : comédie en quatre actes*, 1907: 16, Paris: L'illustration)
- b. *?J' aspire à cette femme.*
 I aspire at/to this woman
 '?I aspire to this woman.'
- (6) a. (...) *le monde entier par la bouche de Jésus-Christ aspire*
 the world whole by the mouth of Jesus Christ aspires
aux lèvres du père (...)
 at/to.the lips of/.the father
 '(...) the whole world, by Jesus Christ's mouth, aspires to the father's lips (...)'
- (C Claudel, Paul, *Un poète regarde la Croix*, 1938: 162, Paris: Gallimard)
- b. *?Il aspire aux lèvres du père.*
 he aspires at/to.the lips of.the father
 '?He aspires to the father's lips.'

The low acceptability of the decontextualized use of the same concrete nominal phrases in (5b) and (6b) attests to the fact that the use of these complements is stylistically marked. In (5a), the construction appears in a highly dramatized context and the use of an animate nominal phrase as an abstract goal, that is, the goal toward which the subject's aspirations are oriented, contributes to the overall dramatic tone of the sentence. In (6a), the concrete nominal phrase is used figuratively. The object *lèvres* 'lips' can indeed be easily interpreted as a synecdoche for God's words.

The abstract Landmark associated with *à* ‘at/to’ not only shows low acceptability with concrete nominal phrases, but also appears to influence the interpretation of concrete nominal phrases at an abstract level. As *à* ‘at/to’ expresses an abstract goal, the concrete nominal phrases incorporated into the abstract Landmark are figuratively reinterpreted as abstract goals.

4.2.3. Semantic analysis

As seen in section 4.1.1, the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal can be represented as the orientation of a Trajector toward a Landmark that constitutes an abstract goal (see Figure 4.1). Consider the following sentence:

- (7) *Il aspire à la paix.*
 he aspires at/to the peace
 ‘He aspires to peace.’

In (7), the subject *il* ‘he’ can be viewed as a Trajector oriented toward a goal, *la paix* ‘the peace’. As shown in section 4.2.1, the notion of goal is expressed both by the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the abstract expression of a goal and by the lexical semantics of the verb, which mirrors the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. The subject *il* ‘he’ is therefore interpreted not only as the Trajector of the verbal construction of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’, but also as the Trajector of the abstract goal expressed by *à* ‘at/to’, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

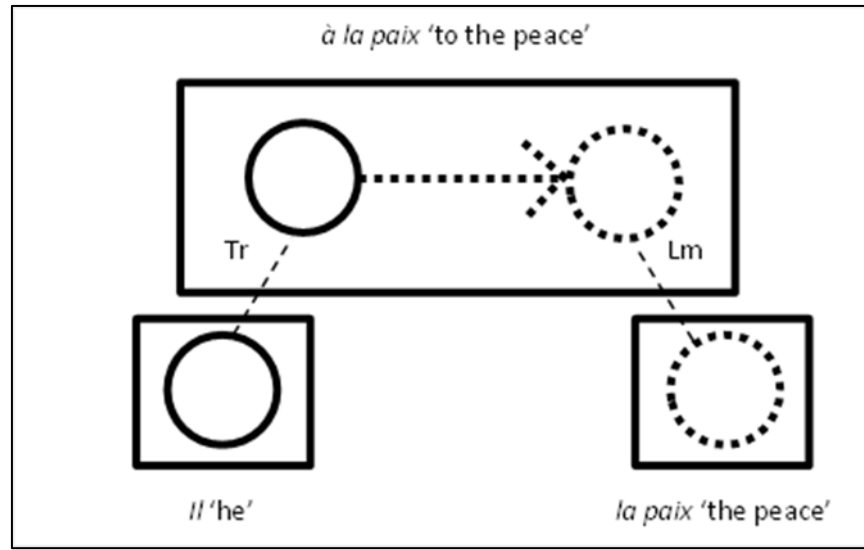


Figure 4.3: Schematization of *à la paix* ‘to the peace’ in (7)

In Figure 4.3, the abstract nominal phrase *la paix* ‘the peace’ is incorporated into the Landmark of *à* ‘at/to’. The dashed circle represents its characterization as an abstract nominal phrase. As discussed in the previous section (section 4.2.2.), given that the Landmark of *à* characterizes an abstract goal, it tends to be incorporated by abstract nominal phrases. In Figure 4.3, there is no semantic compatibility issue between the nominal phrase *la paix* ‘the peace’ and the Landmark of *à* ‘at/to’, as they can be both characterized as abstract. When a concrete nominal phrase incorporates the Landmark of *à* ‘at/to’, it is reinterpreted at a more abstract level, which may lead to a semantic incongruence, depending on the context (see examples (5) and (6) of this chapter). Once incorporated into the Landmark, the nominal phrase *la paix* ‘the peace’ is viewed as the abstract goal toward which the Trajector, the subject of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’ in (7), *il* ‘he’, is oriented.

Figure 4.4 represents the symbolic assembly of the transitive structure of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’ (see section 2.1) and the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. The subject is viewed as the Trajector of the transitive structure of the verb and the implicit Trajector of *à* ‘at/to’. The grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be seen as the Landmark of the transitive construction of the verb, that is, the goal toward which the subject’s aspirations are oriented.

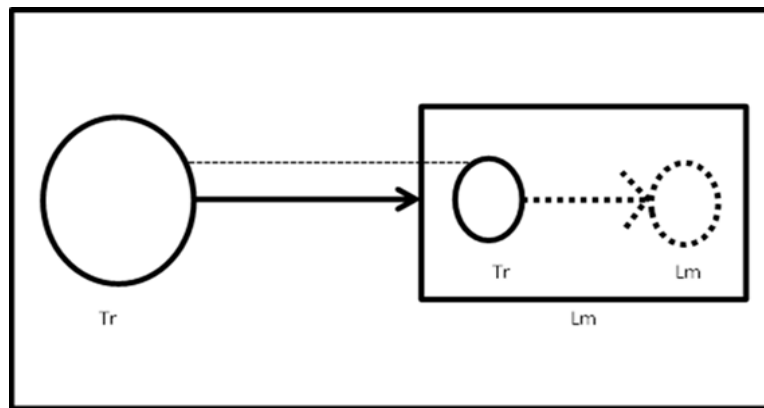


Figure 4.4: Schematization of *aspirer à* ‘to aspire’

In summary, this analysis shows how the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ is encoded in the indirect construction of *aspirer* ‘to aspire’. The grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ has diachronically changed the original meaning of the lexeme, to the point that the lexical semantics of the verb in the indirect construction expresses the notion of goal, which is totally absent from the lexical semantics of the verb used in the direct transitive construction.

4.3. *PARER* ‘TO WARD OFF/TO GUARD AGAINST’

4.3.1. Semantic characterization

In the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum, *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ presents a case of direct/indirect transitive alternation that stands at a lesser degree than the one of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ (see Figure 4.2). In a similar fashion to *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’, the grammatical meaning of abstract goal is encoded in the lexical semantics of the verb but the difference in meaning between the verb in the direct and indirect transitive constructions is less significant than the one found with *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’. As illustrated in (8), the meanings of *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ in the direct (8a) and indirect (8b) transitive constructions are related:

- (8) a. *Il a paré l' attaque.*
he has warded off the attack
‘He warded off the attack.’
- b. *Il a paré à l' attaque.*
he has warded off at/to the attack
‘He guarded against the attack.’

In the direct transitive construction in (8a), the subject has avoided the attack. In the indirect transitive construction in (8b), the subject has been ready to avoid the attack. Both constructions share the notion of avoiding the referent expressed by the object, which is actualized for the direct transitive construction and prospective for the indirect one, as evidenced by (9):

- (9) a. *?Il a paré l' attaque imminente.*
he has warded off the attack imminent
‘?He warded off the imminent attack.’

- b. *Il a paré à l'attaque imminente.*
 he has warded off at/to the attack imminent
 'He guarded against the imminent attack.'

In (9a), the use of the past tense with the direct transitive construction entails that the attack has actually been avoided, which is semantically incongruous with the notion of prospection expressed by the adjective *imminente* 'imminent'. Conversely, in (9b), the use of the adjective *imminente* 'imminent' is perfectly compatible with the notion of prospection expressed by the indirect transitive construction.

The notion of prospection is closely related to the notion of goal and, in the case of *parer à* 'to guard against', results from the semantic import of *à* 'at/to' as the expression of an abstract goal. As shown by the low acceptability of the direct transitive construction of *parer* 'to ward off' in (9a), the notion of prospection, and consequently of goal, is not part of the lexical semantics of the verb. In the indirect transitive construction of *parer à* 'to guard against', the notion of goal is not only expressed by the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to', but is also encoded in the lexical semantics of the verb. While *x pare y* is equivalent to 'x wards off y', *x pare à y* can be interpreted as *x* does something so that *x* can ward off *y*'. The example given in (9b) can indeed be read as the subject having done what was necessary to do to avoid the imminent attack. With *parer à* 'to guard against', the goal of the subject is not the object *per se*, but the lexical semantics of the direct transitive verb *parer* 'ward off'. In other words, the subject's goal is to 'ward off' the referent expressed by the object.

The case of *parer* 'to ward off/to guard against' thus illustrates another example of how the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to' can modify the lexical meaning of the verb.

The notion of abstract goal, expressed by *à* ‘at/to’, is indeed encoded in the lexical meaning of the verb when used in the indirect transitive construction, and absent from the direct transitive construction. In a similar fashion to the case of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ (see section 4.2), the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ appears to have an influence on the types of objects with which the indirect construction is compatible.

4.3.2. Corpus analysis

As shown by Table 4.2 and Table 4.3, *parer* ‘to ward off’ and *parer à* ‘to guard against’ are both mainly compatible with inanimate abstract nominal phrases. However, the influence of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ on some of the syntactic properties of the indirect transitive *parer à* ‘to guard against’ is manifested in the semantic incompatibility between the abstract Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ and concrete nominal phrases. Table 4.2 shows that, among the 180 occurrences of the indirect transitive construction, there was no complement that refers to either an animate or inanimate concrete entity. These results contrast with the occurrences of the direct transitive constructions of *parer* ‘to ward off’ (see Table 4.3), which are compatible with inanimate concrete nominal phrases, even though they are scarce.

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	180	100%
Animate	0	0%
Inanimate Concrete	0	0%
Inanimate Abstract	180	100%
Action	55	30.56%
Non-action	125	69.44%
Infinitival Phrase	0	0%
Finite-tensed Clauses	0	0%
TOTAL	180	100%

Table 4.2: Complementation types of *parer* à ‘to guard against’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	27	100%
Animate	0	0%
Inanimate Concrete	2	7.41%
Inanimate Abstract	25	92.59%
Action	22	81.48%
<i>coup</i> ‘blow’	16	59.26%
other	6	22.22%
Non-action	3	11.11%
Infinitival Phrase	0	0%
Finite-tensed Clauses	0	0%
TOTAL	27	100%

Table 4.3: Complementation types of *parer* ‘to ward off’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

As illustrated in (10), the direct and indirect transitive constructions of *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ differ in terms of semantic compatibility with inanimate concrete nominal phrases:

- (10)a. *Pendant ce châtement, le meurtrier n' a le droit de*
 during this punishment the murderer not has the right of/from
lancer aucune arme; il peut seulement parer les lances, etc.,
 to throw no weapon he can only ward off the spears etc.
avec son bouclier.
 with his shield
 'During this punishment, the murderer is not allowed to throw any weapons; he
 can only ward off the spears, etc., with his shield.'
 (Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *La Mentalité primitive*, 1922: 23, Paris: Presses
 universitaires de France)
- b. *?Il peut seulement parer aux lances.*
 he can only ward off at/to the spears
 'He can only guard against the spears.'

As shown by the acceptability of (10a), the direct transitive construction of *parer* 'to ward off' is compatible with inanimate concrete nominal phrases (i.e., *les lances* 'the spears'). In contrast, despite the similarity of meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions, the indirect transitive construction is semantically incompatible with inanimate concrete nominal phrases, as evidenced by the low acceptability of (10b). Although the two constructions, in a different fashion, entail the notion of avoiding the referent expressed by the object, the object cannot be inanimate concrete in the indirect construction. This difference can be claimed to result from the incompatibility of the abstract Landmark expressed by *à* 'at/to' with concrete nominal phrases.

4.3.3. Semantic analysis

As discussed in the previous section, the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to' is incompatible with concrete nominal phrases. The abstract Landmark expressed by *à* 'at/to' imposes semantic constraints on the type of object with which it can be

compatible. Furthermore, as seen in section 4.3.1, the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ is also encoded in the lexical semantics of *parer* ‘to guard against’ when used in the indirect transitive construction. The lexical semantics of *parer à* ‘to guard against’ therefore entails both the notion of goal and the lexical semantics of *parer* ‘to ward off’.

The lexical semantics of the direct transitive use of *parer* ‘to ward off’ implies that the subject does an action to avoid what can be generally interpreted as an undesirable thing oriented toward her. This generalization can be schematized as the Trajector (i.e., the subject) emitting a force that counteracts an antagonistic force emitted by the Landmark (i.e., the object) (see Figure 4.5).

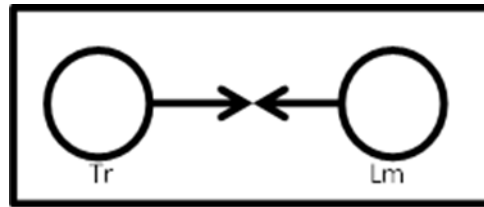


Figure 4.5: Schema of the lexical meaning of *parer* ‘to ward off’

The lexical semantics of *parer* ‘to ward off’ used in the direct transitive construction is only part of the lexical semantic structure of *parer* ‘to guard against’ used in the indirect transitive construction, as represented in Figure 4.6. The lexical meaning of the direct transitive use of *parer* ‘to ward off’ is incorporated into the Landmark of *à* ‘at/to’. In more concrete terms, the lexical meaning of the direct transitive use of *parer* ‘to ward off’ is interpreted as the goal of the subject (see section 4.3.1). The structure

representing the abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be viewed as the Landmark toward which the action of the Trajector is oriented. The overall meaning of *parer à* ‘to guard against’ is interpreted as the subject doing something in order to counteract the antagonistic force emitted by the object.

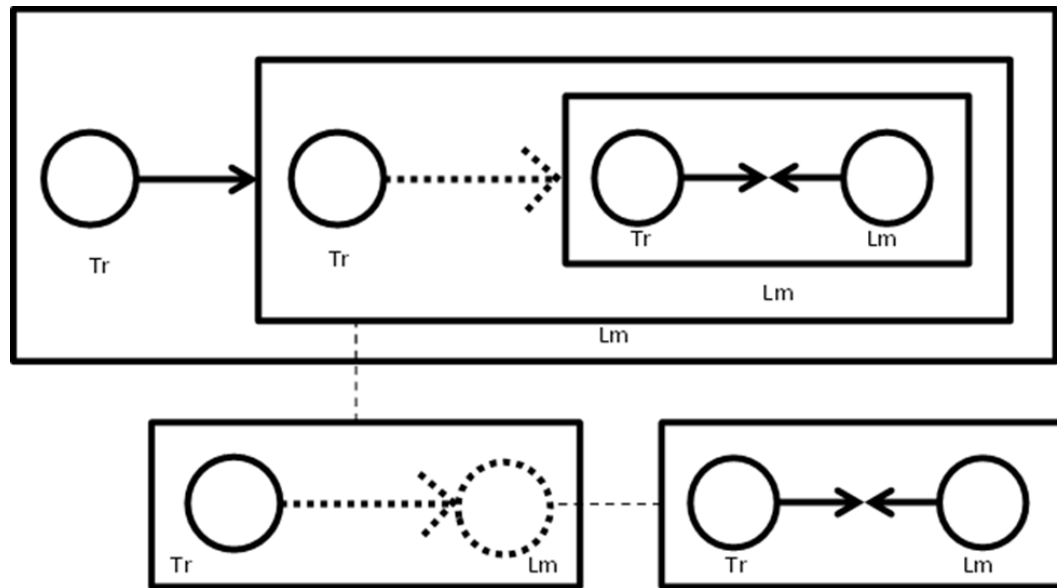


Figure 4.6: Schema of *parer à* ‘to guard against’

This analysis highlights the semantic import of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal, which is central to the lexical semantics of the verb *parer* ‘to guard against’ used in the indirect transitive construction.

4.4. VOIR ‘TO SEE/TO SEE TO’ AND REGARDER ‘TO LOOK AT/TO PAY ATTENTION TO’

4.4.1. Semantic characterization

The direct/indirect transitive alternations of the two verbs of visual perception *voir* ‘to see/to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to look at/to pay attention to’ illustrate a case for which the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ changes the lexical meaning of the verb and the meaning of the whole construction. This case is located at a lower degree than *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ on the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum. In contrast to *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ (see section 4.2) and *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ (see section 4.3), the grammatical meaning is not encoded in the lexical semantics of the verb, which means that the influence of the grammatical meaning on the lexical meaning is lesser with *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’ than with the two verbs previously examined.

The effect of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ on the semantics of the indirect transitive constructions is relatively close for the two verbs. In both cases, the direct transitive construction denotes an act of visual perception, whereas the indirect transitive construction implies attention, vigilance on the part of the subject. Although the meaning of the constructions with *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’ is still related to perception, it is so in a more abstract way than is the meaning of the direct transitive constructions. In the indirect transitive constructions, the notion of vision entailed by the lexical semantics of the verbs used in the direct transitive constructions is systematically interpreted in a figurative way. Consider the data given in (11) and (12):

- (11) a. (...) *je devrais aller voir aux châssis... les mulots ne*
 I should to go see at/to.the cold frames the field mice not
me laissent pas une salade, ces vermines- là (...)
 me leave not a salad these vermins there
 ‘(...) I should go and see to the cold frames... those vermins of field mice do not
 leave me a single lettuce (...)’
 (Mirbeau, Octave, *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*, 1937: 183, Paris:
 Fasquelle)
- b. *Je devrais aller voir les châssis.*
 I should go to see the cold frames
 ‘I should go and see the cold frames.’
- (12) a. (...) *et le spectateur regarde aussi à ce visage, qui*
 and the viewer looks also at/to this face that
peut-être va marquer l' hésitation et la fuite (...)
 maybe goes to mark the hesitation and the flight
 ‘(...) and the viewer also pays attention to this face, which, maybe, is going to
 show signs for hesitation and flight (...)’
 (Alain, *Sentiments, passions et signes*, 1926: 45, Paris: Gallimard)
- b. *Il regarde aussi ce visage.*
 he looks also this face
 ‘He also looks at this face.’

In contrast to the direct transitive constructions in (11b) and (12b), which denote acts of visual perception only, the indirect transitive constructions in (11a) and (12a) imply more involvement on the part of the subject. The construction with *voir à* ‘to see to’ in (11a) can be read as the subject’s going to take care of the cold frames and the one with *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’ in (12a) as the subject’s paying attention to the face. In both examples, the indirect transitive constructions entail the notion of attention, which is coupled with an implicit goal. In (11a), the implicit goal of the subject is to ensure that nothing happens to the cold frames, that the cold frames are in good condition, for

instance, and, similarly, in (12a), the implicit goal of the subject is to scrutinize the face for signs for hesitation or flight.

In the indirect transitive constructions of *voir* ‘to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to pay attention to’, *à* ‘at/to’ thus appears to imply the notion of an abstract goal. The construction *x voit à y* can be roughly interpreted, at a figurative level, as *x* sees *y* so that *x* can take care of anything happening to *y*, and *x regarde à y*, as *x* looks at *y* so that *x* can take notice of anything happening to *y*. In both cases, the subject shows more involvement compared to the direct transitive constructions of the two verbs.

As discussed in section 3.3.2, Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995) and Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) argue that the subject is more involved in constructions with *à* ‘at/to’ than in constructions introduced by *de* ‘of/from’ or constructions that are not preceded by a preposition. A similar effect is found with the subjects of *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’, for which intentionality is involved. With the direct construction, the subject is the experiencer of an act of perception. With the indirect construction, the subject is associated to the underlying expression of an intention related to the object, that is, in rough terms, the intention to see if there is anything wrong happening to the object. I assume that the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ assigns an abstract dimension to the object, one in which intentionality is involved and which is not found in the direct transitive constructions of the verbs.

The cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations illustrated by *voir* ‘to see/to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to look at/to pay attention to’ differ from those of the verbs previously

studied, that is, *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ and *parer* ‘to ward off/to guard against’ (see sections 4.2 and 4.3), in the sense that they do not show the same semantic incompatibility with concrete nominals, for instance. Furthermore, the uses of *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’, in comparison to the other verbs studied in this chapter, turn out to be marginal, as evidenced by the corpus.

4.4.2. Corpus analysis

Based on the occurrences found in the *ARTFL* corpus for 20th century texts (see Table 4.4), the indirect transitive construction of *voir* ‘to see to’ does not appear to be very productive in contemporary reference French⁷. Indeed, a grand total of 6 constructions was found, with only 2 nominal phrases (*au style* ‘to the style’ and *aux châssis* ‘to the cold frames’). Furthermore, the 3 infinitival phrases found in the corpus were part of the colloquial phrase (*il*) *faudrait voir à* ‘we should see to’.

⁷ The indirect transitive construction of *voir* ‘to see to’ appears to be more productive in North American French varieties. In the *Google Books* corpus (for the 20th and 21st century), a search for *voir aux intérêts* ‘see to the interests’, for instance, yields 66 occurrences, all of them being found in books published in Canada.

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	2	33.33%
Animate	0	0%
Inanimate Concrete	1	16.67%
Inanimate Abstract	1	16.67%
Action	0	0%
Non-action	1	16.67%
Infinitival Phrase	3	50%
Finite-tensed Clauses	1	16.67%
TOTAL	6	100%

Table 4.4: Complementation types of *voir à* ‘to see to’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

The indirect transitive construction of *regarder* ‘to pay attention to’ appears to be slightly more productive, with 46 occurrences found (Table 4.5). It should, however, be noted that 17.39% of them are instances of the expression *regarder à la dépense* ‘to pay attention to one’s spending’ and that almost 1/3 of all the other occurrences can be found in texts written by the same author, Alain.

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal phrase	42	91.30%
Animate	2	4.35%
Inanimate Concrete	12	26.09%
Inanimate Abstract	26	56.52%
Action	9	19.56%
<i>la dépense</i> 'spending'	8	17.39%
Non-action	17	36.96%
Infinitival phrase	2	4.35%
Finite-tensed Clauses	2	4.35%
TOTAL	46	100%

Table 4.5: Complementation types of *regarder à* 'to pay attention to' (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

The constructions with *voir à* 'to see to' and *regarder à* 'to pay attention to' thus appear to be relatively marginal in reference French. They differ from most of the other verbs studied in this chapter not only in this respect, but also in the way the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to' expresses the notion of goal.

4.4.3. Semantic analysis

As discussed in section 4.4.1, in constructions with *voir à* 'to see to' and *regarder à* 'to pay attention to', the grammatical meaning of *à* 'at/to' assigns an abstract dimension to the indirect object, which is related to the notion of intentionality. The semantic effect of *à* 'at/to' in these constructions leads to a change of the lexical meaning of the verb. The lexical semantics of the two verbs is coupled with the notion of an underlying

intention on the part of the subject, that is, either taking care or paying attention to the object.

Unlike most of the other verbs studied in this chapter, with *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’, the abstract goal expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ is not the object *per se* but the control of the dimension surrounding the object. With the construction *voir à* ‘to see to’, the subject ensures that nothing happens to the object and, if something does, takes care of the object. With *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’, the subject controls anything that may happen to the object or anything that may happen because of the object. For instance, consider the idiomatic expression *regarder à la dépense* ‘to pay attention to one’s spending’ used in (13):

- (13) *Il regarde à la dépense.*
he looks at/to the spending
‘He pays attention to his spending.’

In (13), the goal of the subject is not to spend money but, *a contrario*, to avoid spending money, or more specifically, to make sure spending does not become a potential issue.

The perception denoted by the verb is thus oriented toward an abstract goal, an abstract dimension surrounding the object. The conceptual semantics of the constructions with *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’ is represented in Figure 4.7. The verbs *voir* ‘to see/to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to look at/to pay attention to’ are transitive and can be symbolically represented as such (see section 2.1.2). The notion of perception denoted by the lexical semantics of the verbs, and consequently, the meaning of their transitive constructions, incorporates the Trajector of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’, which means that the notion of perception they express is oriented toward an

abstract goal, the Landmark, which is the abstract dimension surrounding the object. In more concrete terms, the acts of perception denoted by the two verbs are oriented toward the goal of taking care of the object or paying attention to it. As a result, the notion of perception is partially lost in the indirect transitive constructions of the verbs.⁸

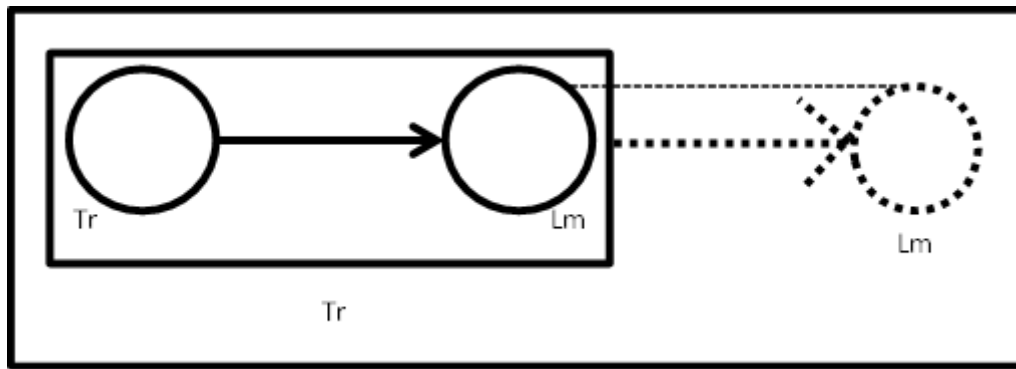


Figure 4.7: Schematization of *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’

Although their use is marginal in some varieties of contemporary French, the indirect transitive constructions still illustrate a case for which the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal can be retrieved.

4.5. *VEILLER* ‘TO WATCH (OVER)’ AND *TRAVAILLER* ‘TO WORK’

4.5.1. Semantic characterization

The verbs *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ present cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations that illustrate the intermediate level of the

⁸ The subject of the indirect constructions of *voir* ‘to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to pay attention to’ does not necessarily have to see. A sentence such as *L’aveugle voit au bétail* ‘The blind man sees to the cattle’ is semantically acceptable even though it would be considered a bad pun.

grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum, that is, the level at which the interaction of meaning is neutral. Both *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ can be used as intransitive verbs and the lexical meaning of the verbs remains the same in the indirect transitive and intransitive constructions, as illustrated in (14) and (15).

- (14)a. *Je veille!*
 I watch (over)
 ‘I am watchful!’
- b. *Je veille à ma santé.*
 I watch (over) at/to my health
 ‘I look after my health.’
- (15)a. *Je travaille.*
 I work
 ‘I am working.’
- b. *Je travaille à mon article.*
 I work at/to my article
 ‘I am working on my article.’

As shown in (14), the meaning of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ is identical in the intransitive construction (14a) and in the indirect transitive one (14b). Similarly, the meaning of the verb *travailler* ‘to work’ does not change between the intransitive construction (15a) and the indirect transitive construction (15b).

The fact that these two verbs can be used intransitively raises the question of the syntactic status of the prepositional phrase, that is, whether it is truly an argument. The *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ test suggested by Tellier (1995) (see section 3.1.2) shows that not all the prepositional phrases introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ are arguments of the verb, as evidenced in (16).

- (16)a. *Je travaille à la maison et j' en fais autant à l' université.*
 I work at/to the house and I of.it do as much at/to the university
 'I work at home and do the same at the university.'
- b. *?Je travaille à mon article et j' en fais autant à ma thèse.*
 I work at/to my article and I of.it do as much at/to my dissertation
 '?!I work on my article and do the same on my dissertation.'
- c. *?Je veille à ma santé et j' en fais autant à mon argent.*
 I watch (over) at/to my health and I of.it do as much at/to my money
 '?!I look after my health and do the same after my money.'

Tellier (1995: 75–76) argues that the expression *en faire autant* 'to do the same' replaces both the verb and its internal argument. Consequently, if a phrase can follow *en faire autant* 'to do the same', it is an adjunct; if not, it is an argument. In (16a), *j'en fais autant* 'I do the same' only replaces *je travaille* 'I work' and the prepositional phrases *à la maison* 'at home' and *à l'université* 'at the university' are adjuncts. In (16b), *j'en fais autant* 'I do the same' substitutes for both *je travaille* 'work' and the prepositional phrase *à mon article* 'on my article', the internal argument of the verb. Consequently, it cannot be followed by another internal argument (*à ma thèse* 'on my dissertation'). This test applied to *veiller à* 'to watch (over)' yields similar results, as attested by the low acceptability of (16c), showing that some of the uses of *travailler* 'to work' and *veiller* 'to watch (over)' can be indirect transitive.

The two verbs can also be used in direct transitive constructions, with a semantic constraint on the type of complements they can select, as shown by (17) and (18):

- (17)a. *Elle veille les morts.*
 she watches (over) the dead
 ‘She keeps watch over the dead.’
- b. ?*Elle veille sa santé.*
 she watches (over) her health
 ‘She keeps watch over her health.’
- (18)a. *Elle travaille le bois/ le fer/ la pâte/ la terre.*
 she works the wood the iron the dough the land
 ‘She works wood/iron/the dough/the land.’
- b. *Elle travaille son anglais/ son piano/ son style/ sa voix.*
 she works her English her piano her style her voice
 ‘She works on her English/her piano/her style/her voice.’
- c. *Elle travaille la boxe/ ses coups francs/ ses revers.*
 she works the boxing her blows franks her backhands
 ‘She practices boxing/her free kicks/her backhands.’
- d. *Elle travaille des chevaux de courses/ des taureaux.*
 she works some horses of race some bulls
 ‘She trains race horses/bulls.’
- e. ?*Elle travaille son article.*
 she works her article
 ‘?She works her article.’

The direct transitive construction of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ is only compatible with direct objects marked by the semantic features [DEAD] or [SICK], which explains the acceptability of (17a) and the low acceptability of (17b). Similarly, the direct transitive construction of *travailler* ‘to work’ is only compatible with objects marked by the feature [MATERIALS] (18a), with some objects pertaining to the intellectual and artistic domains

(18b) and to the sports domain (18c), and with some objects referring to animals (18d), which can account for the low acceptability of (18e).

Despite the semantic constraints on the type of objects with which the direct transitive construction of these verbs is compatible, meaning differences related to the notion of goal can still be observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions. Consider the following examples of the direct and indirect constructions of the verb *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ (19):

- (19)a. *Elle a veillé les enfants (?en bonne santé) toute la nuit.*
 she has watched (over) the children in good health all the night
 ‘She kept watch over the (?healthy) children all night long.’
- b. *Elle a veillé aux enfants (en bonne santé) toute la nuit.*
 she has watched (over) at/to.the children in good health all the night
 ‘She looked after the (healthy) children all night long.’

As shown by the low acceptability of *en bonne santé* ‘healthy’ with *les enfants* ‘the children’ in (19a), the direct object of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ is implicitly marked by the feature [SICK]. The direct object can thereby hardly be interpreted as a goal toward which the process is oriented. The children’s being sick is not the goal of the subject but rather what motivates the process. Conversely, in (19b), the object can be interpreted, at some level, as the goal toward which the process is oriented. With the indirect transitive construction, the goal of the subject is to ensure that nothing happens to the children, to take care of the children. Similarly to the way the goal is expressed with the perception

verbs *voir à* ‘to see to’ and *regarder à* ‘to pay attention to’ (see section 4.4), the goal of the subject in the indirect transitive construction of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ is not the object *per se*, but an abstract dimension surrounding the object, that is, in (19b), the well-being of the children.

The notion of goal associated with *à* ‘at/to’ may also entail prospection as evidenced by the contrast between the indirect transitive construction introduced by *à* ‘at/to’ and the competing construction introduced by *sur* ‘on’ (20):

- (20) a. ?*Je travaille à l’ article que je viens d’ écrire.*
 I work at/to the article that I come of/from to write
 ‘I am working on the article that I have just written.’
- b. *Je travaille sur l’ article que je viens d’ écrire.*
 I work on the article that I come of/from to write
 ‘I am working on the article that I have just written.’
- c. *Je veille au développement futur du projet.*
 I watch (over) at/to.the development future of.the project
 ‘I see to the future development of the project.’
- d. ?*Je veille sur le développement futur du projet.*
 I watch (over) on the development future of.the project
 ‘?I watch over the future development of the project.’

In (20a), the indirect transitive construction has a prospective reading which is semantically incompatible with the relative clause *que je viens d’écrire* ‘that I have just written’. The goal implied by the indirect construction is the completion of the object, and the article is therefore interpreted as work to be completed, not as completed work. In contrast, in (20b), the preposition *sur* ‘on’ does not entail the notion of goal and the object can consequently be viewed as completed work, hence the semantic compatibility

with the relative clause. In (20c), the object *le développement futur du projet* ‘the future development of the project’ entails prospection and is compatible with *veiller à* ‘to watch (over)’, which also entails the notion of prospection. Conversely, in (20d), *veiller sur* ‘to watch (over)’ does not entail prospection, hence its low compatibility with the notion of the object *le développement future du projet* ‘the future development of the project’.

The contrast between the competing constructions with *à* ‘at/to’ and *sur* ‘on’, observed with both *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’, can also be used to point out the lower semantic affinity between *à* ‘at/to’ and concrete nominal phrases, as evidenced by the corpus.

4.5.2. Corpus analysis

Like the other verbs studied in this chapter, the indirect transitive construction of *travailler* ‘to work’ and *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ with *à* ‘at/to’ tends to be more compatible with abstract than with concrete nominal phrases. This tendency can be accounted for through the abstract characterization of the Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’. As observed in section 4.5.1, the concrete objects of the indirect constructions are associated with an abstract dimension, the subject’s goal, which can be, for instance, the well-being of the object with *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ (see example (19b)) or the completion of the object with *travailler* ‘to work’ (see example (20a)). The semantic affinity between *à* ‘at/to’ and abstract nominal phrases is clearly evidenced by the contrast between the types of complements the indirect construction with *à* ‘at/to’ and the competing one with *sur* ‘on’ occur with (see Tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9).

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	277	58.19% (100%)
Animate	7	1.47% (2.53%)
Inanimate Concrete	40	8.40% (14.44%)
Inanimate Abstract	230	48.32% (83.03%)
Action	123	25.84% (44.40%)
Non-action	107	22.48% (38.63%)
Infinitival Phrase	67	14.08%
Finite-tensed Clauses	132	27.73%
TOTAL	476	100%

Table 4.6: Complementation types of *veiller à* ‘to watch (over)’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	286	100%
Animate	149	52.10%
Nouns	53	18.53%
Pronouns	96	33.57%
Inanimate Concrete	58	20.28%
Inanimate Abstract	79	27.62%
Action	8	2.80%
Non-action	71	24.82%
Infinitival Phrase	0	0%
Finite-tensed Clauses	0	0%
TOTAL	286	100%

Table 4.7: Complementation types of *veiller sur* ‘to watch (over)’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	119	59.80%(100%)
Animate	0	0% (0%)
Inanimate Concrete	36	18.09% (30.25%)
Inanimate Abstract	83	41.71% (69.75%)
Action	59	29.65% (49.58%)
Non-action	24	12.06% (20.17%)
Infinitival Phrase	79	39.70%
Finite-tensed Clauses	1	0.50%
TOTAL	199	100%

Table 4.8: Complementation types of *travailler à* ‘to work’ (ARTFL corpus/20th century)

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	83	100%
Animate	4	4.82%
Inanimate Concrete	39	46.99%
Inanimate Abstract	40	48.19%
Action	1	1.20%
Non-action	39	46.99%
Infinitival Phrase	0	0%
Finite-tensed Clauses	0	0%
TOTAL	83	100%

Table 4.9: Complementation types of *travailler sur* ‘to work’ (ARTFL corpus/20th century)

As shown in Tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9, only the indirect constructions of *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ with *à* ‘at/to’ are compatible with infinitives and finite-tensed clauses. Among the nominal phrases with which the constructions occur, concrete nominal phrases respectively represent 16.97% (2.53% for animate +

14.44% for inanimate concrete) of all the occurrences of nominal phrases found for *veiller à* ‘to watch (over)’ (Table 4.6) and 30.25% for *travailler à* ‘to work’ (Table 4.8). In comparison, the occurrences of concrete nominal phrases represent 72.38%⁹ and 51.81%¹⁰ of all the occurrences of nominal phrases found for *veiller sur* ‘to watch (over)’ (Table 4.7) and *travailler sur* ‘to work’ (Table 4.9), respectively. This contrast supports the argument that, because of its abstract characterization, the Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ is semantically more compatible with abstract than concrete nominal phrases.

4.5.3. Semantic analysis

As discussed in section 4.5.1, the indirect constructions of the verbs *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ entail the notion of goal, which is absent from both the direct transitive constructions of these verbs and their constructions with *sur* ‘on’. Furthermore, as seen in section 4.5.2, the abstract Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ appears to determine the type of indirect objects that can be compatible with the verbs, in the sense that they tend to be more abstract, or assigned a more abstract dimension, than with the preposition *sur* ‘on’.

In the indirect constructions with *à* ‘at/to’, the lexical meanings of the verbs *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’ can be interpreted as the Trajector oriented toward the abstract goal that constitutes the Landmark (see Figure 4.8).

⁹ 149 occurrences of animate nominal phrases + 58 occurrences of inanimate concrete nominal phrases out of 286 occurrences of nominal phrases.

¹⁰ 4 occurrences of animate nominal phrases + 39 occurrences of inanimate concrete nominal phrases out of 83 occurrences of nominal phrases.

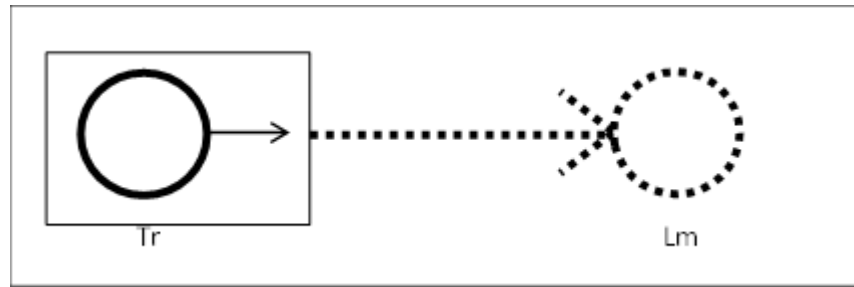


Figure 4.8: Schematization of *veiller à* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler à* ‘to work’

In more concrete terms, *x veille à y* ‘*x* watches over/looks after *y*’ means that *x* keeps watch with the goal of taking care of *y* and *x travaille à y* ‘*x* works on *y*’ means that *x* works with a goal surrounding *y*, as illustrated in (21):

- (21) a. *On travaille au cercueil.*
 one works at/to.the coffin
 ‘We are working on the coffin.’
 (C Claudel, Paul, *La J.F. Violaine : 2. version*, 1901, in *Théâtre, Tome 1*, 1960: 638, Paris: Gallimard)
- b. *Le pire des maux, c’ est le législateur de fantaisie,*
 the worst of.the evils it is the legislator of whimsy
qui travaille au bonheur des autres.
 who works at/to.the happiness of.the others
 ‘The worst of evils, it is the whimsical legislator who works on the others’ happiness.’
 (Alain, *Éléments d’une Doctrine radicale*, 1925: 205, Paris: Gallimard)
- c. *Chaque fois que j’ ai travaillé au problème de l’*
 every time that I have worked at/to.the issue of the
argent avec les adolescents (...)
 money with the teenagers
 ‘Every time I worked on the issue of money with teenagers (...)’
 (Alaméda, Antoine, *Les 7 péchés familiaux*, 1998: 157, Paris: Odile Jacob)

The goal surrounding the object of *travailler à* ‘to work’ can be to complete the realization of the referent of the object (21a), to ensure the state denoted by the object (21b) or to resolve the issue expressed by the object (21c).

The indirect transitive construction of the two verbs with *à* ‘at/to’ does not lead to any change of the lexical meaning of the verbs and this construction can be viewed as a composite structure of both the lexical semantics of the verbs and the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’, with no interaction between the two.

4.6. PRO-EVENTIVE VERB CLASS

The pro-eventive verb class presents a case of argument alternation which, in the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum, can illustrate how the lexical semantics of the verb can motivate the use of the grammatical meaning of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. In this subsection, after defining the morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the pro-eventive verb class, with regards to the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum (section 4.6.1), I focus on the set of pro-eventive verbs showing cases of argument alternations (section 4.6.2) and finally, I discuss issues related to the valence of these verbs (section 4.6.3).

4.6.1. Definition and properties

The set of verbs studied in this section includes *aider* ‘to help’; *autoriser* ‘to allow’; *conduire* ‘to drive/to lead to’; *encourager* ‘to encourage’; *entraîner* ‘to lead/to train’; *forcer* ‘to force’; *incliner* ‘to incline/to prompt’; *initier* ‘to initiate’; *pousser* ‘to

push/to urge’ and these verbs all share the type of complementation pattern illustrated in

(22):

- (22) a. *Les professeurs aident les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors help the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors help the students to meditate.’
- b. *Les professeurs autorisent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors allow the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors allow the students to meditate.’
- c. *Les professeurs conduisent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors drive the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors drive the students to meditate.’
- d. *Les professeurs encouragent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors encourage the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors encourage the students to meditate.’
- e. *Les professeurs entraînent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors lead/train the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors lead/train the students to meditate.’
- f. *Les professeurs forcent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors force the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors force the students to meditate.’
- g. *Les professeurs inclinent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors incline the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors prompt the students to meditate.’
- h. *Les professeurs initient les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors initiate the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors initiate the students to meditate.’
- i. *Les professeurs poussent les étudiants à méditer.*
the professors push the students at/to to meditate
‘The professors urge the students to meditate.’

The similar complementation pattern of the conjugated verbs in (22) consists of a direct object (O), *les étudiants* ‘the students’, which is the semantic subject of the infinitive

predicate *méditer* ‘to meditate’, the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ and an infinitive predicate (V_{inf}), *méditer* ‘to meditate’ (henceforth $O \ à \ V_{inf}$).

This common morphosyntactic property raises the question of whether the use of this complementation pattern is idiosyncratic or semantically motivated, that is, whether the lexical meaning of the verbs entails the underlying meaning of $O \ à \ V_{inf}$. Gross (1969) reveals that all the verbs selecting the $O \ à \ V_{inf}$ complementation pattern but two (*mettre* ‘to put’; *surprendre* ‘to surprise’) can be categorized into one of the following six semantic classes: coercive (*forcer* ‘to force’; *obliger* ‘to compel’), exhortative (*encourager* ‘to encourage’), permissive (e.g., *autoriser* ‘to allow’), figurative motion (e.g., *conduire* ‘to drive/to lead to’; *entraîner* ‘to lead’; *incliner* ‘to incline/to prompt’; *pousser* ‘to push/to urge’), habitative (*entraîner* ‘to train’; *initier* ‘to initiate’) and adjuvant verbs (*aider* ‘to help’).

These six verb classes can actually be subsumed into a unique verb class, namely, the pro-eventive verb class, which can be defined as the class of verbs whose lexical semantics entails the expression of a physical or mental force oriented toward the occurrence of the event denoted by the complementation pattern $O \ à \ V_{inf}$. In other words, all the pro-eventive verbs imply the unleashing of potency, i.e., “a physical or mental force that, when unleashed, tends to bring about the occurrence of that process” (Langacker 1991: 270). In (22), for instance, the lexical semantics of all the verbs entail the expression of a force oriented toward the occurrence of the event *les étudiants méditent* ‘the students meditate’. The specific nature of the force depends on the lexical semantics of each verb.

The unleashing of potency expressed by the lexical semantics of the pro-eventive verbs implicates that the event denoted by the complementation pattern $O \dot{a} V_{inf}$ would not have necessarily happened under other circumstances. In all the examples given in (22), there appears to be a negative dimension associated to the event denoted by $O \dot{a} V_{inf}$. In (22a), the students are helped to do something that they might not have been able to do by themselves. In (22b), the students are allowed to do something they might not have been able to do without authorization. In (22c), and in (22g), the students are led to do something that they might not have done otherwise. The students are encouraged, in (22d), or pushed, in (22i), to do something that they might not do or could stop doing. In (22e), the students are trained to do something better. In (22f), the students are forced to do something that they did not necessarily want to do. In (22h), the students are initiated to learn something unknown.

These schematized paraphrases underline the semantic similarities between the verbs belonging to the pro-eventive class. They all imply an antagonistic potency associated to the event denoted by $O \dot{a} V_{inf}$, in the sense that the event would not, could not or should not happen or have happened without the intervention of the animate subject of the pro-eventive verb, or the presence of the inanimate subject¹¹. The lexical semantics of the pro-eventive verbs thus entails the unleashing of a protagonistic force (i.e., potency) countering the antagonistic force (i.e., antagonistic potency) implied by the event denoted by $O \dot{a} V_{inf}$.

¹¹ Note that pro-eventive verbs can also have inanimate subjects (e.g., *La situation a aidé/forcé/encouragé les étudiants à méditer*. 'The situation helped/forced/encouraged the students to meditate.') (see Achard 1998).

In his analysis of *forcer* ‘to force’ as a causative verb, Achard (1998: 102–103) points out that, in contrast to the *faire* ‘to make’ causative construction, O is necessarily viewed as being in control of the event denoted by V_{inf} , as illustrated by (23):

- (23)a. ?*Il a forcé Emma à tomber.*
 he has forced Emma at/to to fall
 ‘?He forced Emma to fall.’
- b. *Il a fait tomber Emma.*
 he has made to fall Emma
 ‘He made Emma fall.’

In (23a), the low acceptability of the sentence results from the incompatibility between the semantic subject *Emma*, viewed as being in control, and the spontaneous event *tomber* ‘to fall’.¹² With the *faire* ‘to make’ causative construction illustrated in (23b), the complement *Emma* is not necessarily viewed as being in control of the process *tomber* ‘to fall’, hence the acceptability of the sentence.

Achard (1998: 103–104) correlates this semantic property of O with the abstract meaning of *à* characterized by Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) in terms of active participation of the semantic subject in the performance of the infinitival process (see section 3.3.2). The semantic subject O is thereby viewed as being in control of V_{inf} , as an active participant that consciously, even though reluctantly in the case of *forcer* ‘to force’, performs the infinitival process. Furthermore, Achard (1998: 103–104) observes that, through the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as “an abstract path toward a goal” (Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996: 367), the abstract path from O toward the infinitival process is

¹² The sentence given in (23a) could be acceptable in a context through which the process *tomber* ‘to fall’ could be viewed as being controlled (i.e., *Il a forcé Emma à tomber pour toucher l’assurance.* ‘He forced Emma to fall to get the insurance.’).

made specific. He argues that this abstract path needs to be made specific as it is not initiated by O, but by the main subject (1998: 104). This analysis can be extended to the whole class of pro-eventive verbs.

The lexical semantics of pro-eventive verbs express a protagonisitic force countering the underlying antagonistic force between O and V_{inf}. This protagonistic force can be assimilated to an abstract goal, in the sense that it orients O toward the infinitival process. The use of *à* ‘at/to’ is therefore motivated by the protagonistic force expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb. Consider the following minimal pair:

- (24)a. *Christian a encouragé Emma à lire ce livre.*
 Christian has encouraged Emma at/to to read this book
 ‘Christian encouraged Emma to read this book.’
- b. *Christian a découragé Emma de lire ce livre.*
 Christian has discouraged Emma of/from to read this book
 ‘Christian discouraged Emma from reading this book.’

In (24a), the lexical semantics of the pro-eventive verb *encourager* ‘to encourage’ expresses a protagonistic force, Christian’s encouragement, orienting O, Emma, toward the infinitival process, and implies an antagonistic force, that is, in this example, the fact that Emma might not have wanted to read the book or might not have heard of it, or more generally, that the performance of the process by O was problematic at some level. Conversely, in (24b), the lexical semantics of the verb *décourager* ‘to discourage’ expresses an antagonistic force, Christian’s discouragement, preventing Emma from reading the book, and implies a protagonistic force, the fact that Emma might have wanted to read the book or might have been reading it. It thus appears that the difference in lexical semantics between the two verbs motivates the use of a different preposition

and that the use of *à* ‘at/to’ is not fortuitous, but motivated by the lexical semantics of the pro-eventive verbs.

The pro-eventive verbs illustrate a case for which the lexical meaning of the verbs motivates the use of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal encodes the protagonistic force expressed by the lexical semantics of the verbs by orienting O toward V_{inf} , as represented in Figures 4.9 and 4.10.

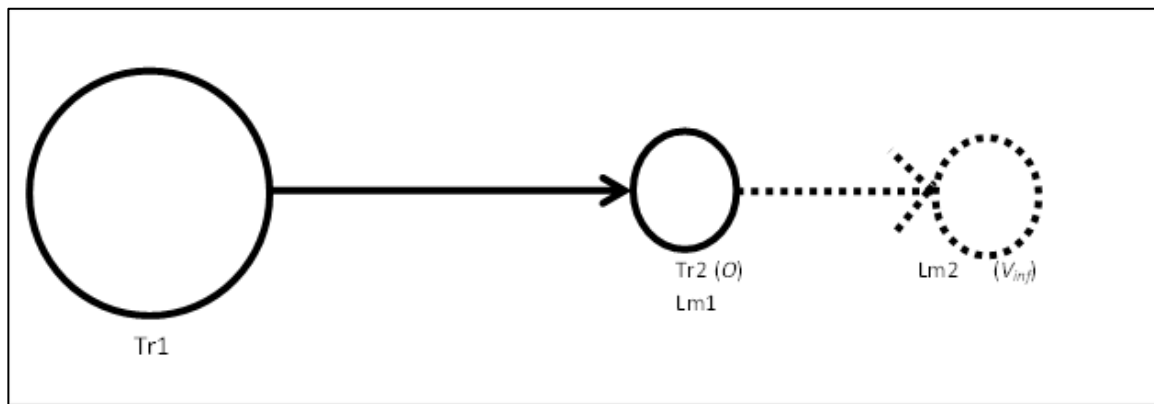


Figure 4.9: Schematization of pro-eventive verbs with potential omission of V_{inf}

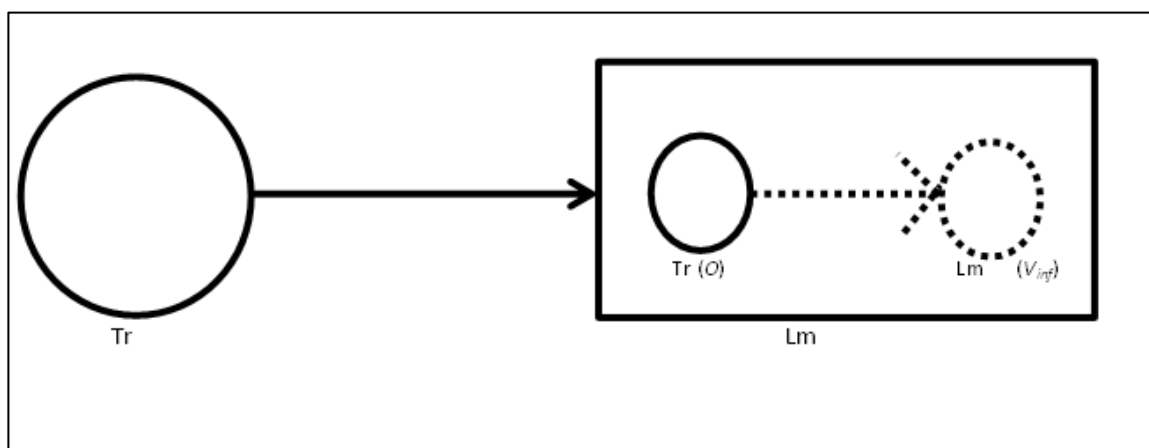


Figure 4.10: Schematization of pro-eventive verbs without potential omission of V_{inf}

The two structural representations in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 correspond to two different morphosyntactic properties that pro-eventive verbs present. As illustrated in (25), some verbs, such as *aider* ‘to help’ do not require the presence of the infinitival process in their complementation (25a), while others, such as *forcer* ‘to force’, do (25b):

- (25)a. *Chantal a aidé Paul (à faire ses devoirs).*
 Chantal has helped Paul at/to to make his homework
 ‘Chantal has helped Paul (to do his homework).’
- b. *Chantal a forcé Paul ?(à faire ses devoirs).*
 Chantal has forced Paul at/to to make his homework
 ‘Chantal has forced Paul ?(to do his homework).’

As shown in (25a), the infinitival process *faire ses devoirs* ‘to do his homework’ can be omitted without leading to the low acceptability of the sentence, whereas the omission of the infinitival process in (25b) leads to a low acceptability of the sentence.

In Figure 4.9, which structurally represents the pro-eventive verbs for which the infinitival process can be omitted, the subject (Tr1) of the pro-eventive verb is a source of

energy of which O (Lm1) is the recipient, and, through the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal, O (Tr2) is oriented toward V_{inf} (Lm2). In Figure 4.10, corresponding to the pro-eventive verbs for which the infinitival process cannot be omitted, it is the whole setting of the orientation of O toward V_{inf} , through the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’, which constitutes the Landmark of the main subject.

The pro-eventive verb class illustrates a case for which the lexical semantics of the verb motivates the use of *à* ‘at/to’. Even though the structural representations provided in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 concern only cases of infinitival complementation, they remain central to the understanding of the semantic differences observed in the argument alternations of the pro-eventive verbs.

4.6.2. Argument alternations of pro-eventive verbs

The verbs belonging to the pro-eventive class and showing cases of argument alternations can be divided into three categories: the verbs for which the alternation corresponds to a change of lexical meaning (see (26)–(29)), the verbs for which the direct and indirect object selects different semantic types of complements (see (30) and (31)) and the verbs for which the type of complement can be similar but with a semantic difference between the direct and indirect transitive construction resulting from the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ (see (32) and (33)):

- (26)a. *Ils ont conduit la voiture.*
 they have driven the car
 ‘They drove the car.’

- b. *Cela a conduit à la construction d' une école.*
 this has driven at/to the construction of a school
 'This led to the construction of a school.'
- (27)a. *Ils ont forcé la serrure.*
 they have forced the lock
 'They forced the lock.'
- b. *Ils ont forcé à la construction d' une école.*
 they have forced at/to the construction of a school
 'They imposed the construction of a school.'
- (28)a. *Ils ont incliné la bouteille.*
 they have inclined the bottle
 'They inclined the bottle.'
- b. *Cela a incliné à la construction d' une école.*
 this has inclined at/to the construction of a school
 'This led to the construction of a school.'
- (29)a. *Ils ont poussé Emma.*
 they have pushed Emma
 'They pushed Emma.'
- b. *Ils ont poussé à la construction d' une école.*
 they have pushed at/to the construction of a school
 'They urged the construction of a school.'
- (30)a. *Ils entraînent les étudiants/ ?la méditation.*
 they train the students the meditation
 'They train the students/?the meditation.'
- b. *Ils entraînent à la méditation/?aux étudiants.*
 they train at/to the meditation at/to.the students
 'They train for meditation/?for students.'
- (31)a. *Ils initient les étudiants/?la méditation.*
 they initiate the students/ the meditation
 'They initiate the students/?the meditation.'¹³

¹³ The object *la méditation* 'the meditation' is not compatible with *initier* 'to initiate' when the verb is used in the sense of inducing someone to do something.

- b. *Ils initient à la méditation/ ?aux étudiants.*
 they initiate at/to the meditation at/to.the students
 ‘They initiate to meditation/?to the students.’
- (32) a. *Ils ont aidé la construction d’ une école.*
 they have helped the construction of a school
 ‘They helped the construction of a school.’
- b. *Ils ont aidé à la construction d’ une école.*
 they have helped at/to the construction of a school
 ‘They helped the construction of a school.’
- (33) a. *Ils ont encouragé la construction d’ une école.*
 they have encouraged the construction of a school
 ‘They encouraged the construction of a school.’
- b. *Ils ont encouragé à la construction d’ une école.*
 they have encouraged at/to the construction of a school
 ‘They encouraged the construction of a school.’

With the verbs *conduire* ‘to drive/to lead to’, *forcer* ‘to force’, *incliner* ‘to incline/to prompt’ and *pousser* ‘to push/to urge’, as illustrated in (26)–(29), while the direct construction of the verbs corresponds to a more literal sense of the verb ((26a), (27a) (28a) and (29a)), the meaning of the verb used in the indirect constructions is more figurative and is equivalent to the meaning of the same verb when followed by the O à V_{inf} pattern ((26b), (27b), (28b) and (29b)).

The verbs *entraîner* ‘to train’ and *initier* ‘to initiate’ show a different type of complementation in relation to their direct and indirect transitive uses. With the direct transitive construction ((30a) and (31a)), the direct object corresponds to O in the O à V_{inf} pattern and is in control of an implicit process. The direct transitive construction is not compatible with a nominalized process. With the indirect transitive construction ((30b)

and (31b)), the complement corresponds to a nominalized V_{inf} . The indirect construction is not compatible with an animate noun.

The verbs *aider* ‘to help’ and *encourager* ‘to encourage’, unlike the previous category, show more similarities in the type of objects with which their direct ((32a) and (33a)) and indirect ((32b) and (33b)) transitive constructions are compatible. Although the meaning difference is not clearly perceptible between the direct and indirect constructions of the two verbs, there still appear to be semantic nuances between them, which can be argued to result from the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. Consider the two following sets of examples:

- (34)a. *Votre don peut aider la liberté des habitants.*
 your donation can help the freedom of.the inhabitants
 ‘Your donation can help the freedom of the inhabitants.’
- b. *Votre don peut aider à la liberté des habitants.*
 your donation can help at/to the freedom of.the inhabitants.
 ‘Your donation can help the freedom of the inhabitants.’
- c. *Votre don peut aider la pauvreté des habitants.*
 your donation can help the poverty of.the inhabitants
 ‘Your donation can help the poverty of the inhabitants.’
- d. *?Votre don peut aider à la pauvreté des habitants.*
 your donation can help at/to the poverty of.the inhabitants.
 ‘Your donation can help the poverty of the inhabitants.’
- (35)a. *Le gouvernement encourage la réussite avérée de ce programme.*
 the administration encourages the success established of this program
 ‘The administration encourages the established success of this program.’

- b. ?*Le gouvernement encourage à la réussite avérée*
 the administration encourages at/to the success established
 de ce programme.
 of this program
 ‘The administration encourages the established success of this program.’

In the two sentences in (34a) and (34b), it can be deduced that the donation is used to support the freedom of the inhabitants and the meaning difference between (34a) and (34b) is subtle, as compared to the contrast between (34c) and (34d). The sentence in (34c) leads to an interpretation in which the donation is meant to fight poverty. The low acceptability of (34d) shows that the interpretation of (34c) is not available with the indirect construction. Through the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’, the indirect object is perceived as an abstract goal, that is, the goal toward which the process is oriented. In (34b), the goal is the state of freedom of the inhabitants. In (34d), the goal would be the state of poverty of the inhabitants, which does not make much sense in the context of a donation. The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal also appears to influence the interpretation of the lexical meaning of the verb *encourager* ‘to encourage’. The direct transitive construction of the verb *encourager* ‘to encourage’ can entail either prospection or actualization. With the direct transitive construction *encourager la construction d’une école* ‘to encourage the construction of a school’ (33a), for instance, the construction of the school can be interpreted as either under way (actualization) or not yet started (prospection). The contrast between the acceptability of (35a) and the low acceptability of (35b) shows that, with the indirect transitive construction, only the prospective reading is available. The use of *avérée* ‘established’ conditions an interpretation in terms of actualization, which is compatible with the direct transitive

construction (35a) but not with the indirect one (35b). The notion of prospection associated with *à* ‘at/to’ can be argued to bias the interpretation of the lexical semantics of *encourager* ‘to encourage’ only in terms of prospection.

The use of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive constructions of the pro-eventive verbs illustrated in (26)–(35) thus appears to be closely related to the one in the O *à* V_{inf} pattern (see section 4.6.1). In both the infinitival and nominal constructions, *à* ‘at/to’ expresses an abstract goal, be it either with a nominalized verbal predicate (i.e., *la construction* ‘the construction’) or not (i.e., *la liberté* ‘freedom’). The semantic similarities in the use of *à* ‘at/to’ between the two constructions also correlate with syntactic commonalities. The indirect transitive constructions in (26b)–(33b), in which the indirect object is a nominalized predicate, a noun equivalent in its function to O in the O *à* V_{inf} pattern could indeed be retrieved, as illustrated for some verbs in (36):

- (36) *Ils ont forcé /poussé /encouragé les autorités à la*
they have forced urged encouraged the authorities at/to the
construction d’ une école.
construction of a school
‘ They forced/urged/encouraged the authorities to build a school.’

In (36), the nominal phrase *les autorités* ‘the authorities’ can be interpreted as the implicit semantic subject of the nominalized verbal predicate *construction* ‘construction’, in a similar fashion to O being the semantic subject of V_{inf} in the O *à* V_{inf} pattern. This property raises the question of the valence of the pro-eventive verbs, that is, whether the pro-eventive verbs should be systematically regarded as ditransitive, as in (36), rather than indirect transitive in some of their uses, as in, for instance, (26b)–(33b). This issue is discussed in the following subsection.

4.6.3. On the valence of pro-eventive verbs

In the framework of Cognitive Grammar, as defined by Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008), the valence of the verbs is not intrinsic to the lexical semantics of the verb, but results from the integration of component structures (Langacker 1987: 156–157; see section 2.1). Using this usage-based approach, I argue that pro-eventive verbs are not inherently ditransitive and that the indirect transitive use of these verbs semantically and pragmatically differs from their ditransitive use. Let us first consider the complementation types selected by the indirect transitive construction of one of the pro-eventive verbs, *aider* ‘to help’, in the *ARTFL* corpus (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10 shows that the use of the infinitival mode of complementation is far much more frequent than the nominal mode. In fact, the use of the nominal type of complementation is relatively marginal. As far as the nominal phrases are concerned, the absence of concrete nominal phrases in the corpus can be argued to result from the abstract characterization of the Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ (see sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5). Furthermore, the type of nominal phrases compatible with *aider à* ‘to help’ is mainly nominalized actions (85.02% of all the occurrences of nominal phrases), which suggests a parallel between the nominal phrases and the infinitival phrases. The nominal phrases are indeed mainly nominalized processes, and their use actually appears to be mainly motivated by the absence of an equivalent of O in the $O \ à \ V_{inf}$ pattern, as illustrated by Table 4.11.

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	207	8.33%
Animate	0 ¹⁴	0%
Inanimate Concrete	0	0%
Inanimate Abstract	207	8.33% (100%)
Action	176	7.08% (85.02%)
Non-action	31	1.25% (14.98%)
Infinitival Phrase	2276	91.59%
Finite-tensed Clauses	2	0.08%
TOTAL	2485	100%

Table 4.10: Complementation types of *aider à* ‘to help’ (*ARTFL* corpus/ 20th century)

	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Indirect transitive	204	98.55%
Ditransitive	3	1.45%
TOTAL	207	100%

Table 4.11: Types of constructions with *aider à* ‘to help’ followed by nominal phrases (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

Table 4.11 shows that only 1.45% of the indirect objects are part of a ditransitive construction. It then appears that the use of nominal phrases and the use of the indirect transitive constructions of the verb is semantically or pragmatically motivated by the omission of the semantic subject (for nominalized predicates), the equivalent of O in the O à V_{inf} pattern, as illustrated in (37):

¹⁴ A couple of animates were found but discarded as the constructions in which they appear (i.e., *#aider à Marie* ‘to help Mary’) are considered in the literature as belonging to specific regional varieties (see Lüdi 1981).

- (37)a. *Ces mesures aident au développement économique.*
 these measures help at/to.the development economic
 ‘These measures help the economic development.’
- b. *Ces mesures aident à développer l’ économie.*
 these measures help at/to develop the economy
 ‘These measures help to develop the economy.’
- c. *Ces mesures aident les pays pauvres à développer leur économie.*
 these measures help the countries poor at/to develop
 their economy
 ‘These measures help the poor countries to develop their economy.’
- d. ?*Ces mesures aident les pays pauvres au développement économique.*
 these measures help the countries poor at/to.the
 development economic
 ‘These measure help the economic development of the poor countries.’

In (37a), the implicit subject of the nominalized verbal predicate *développement* ‘development’ appears to be omitted on semantic and pragmatic grounds, in the sense that the subject cannot necessarily be specified (i.e., there can be several actors of the development) and retrieved from the context and/or our knowledge of the world (i.e., the actors of the development are unknown). Furthermore, the semantic difference between the nominalized and infinitival process can also account for the use of either of the constructions. The infinitival process in (37b) necessarily implies an exterior agent to develop the economy, while in (37a), the economy can be viewed as a self-regulating system that can be the source of its own development. Note that the omission of the semantic subject does not require the systematic use of the indirect construction with a nominal complement, as illustrated by the use of an infinitival complement in (37b), but

simply appears to favor it. Conversely, when the semantic subject is expressed, the infinitival construction (37c) appears more felicitous than the nominal one (37d).

Although the indirect transitive use of the pro-eventive verbs with nominal arguments could be assimilated to a ditransitive construction in which an implicit direct object is omitted, this parallel is far from being systematic, owing not only to the semantic and pragmatic motivations described above, but also to the fact that pro-eventive verbs can be compatible with nominal phrases that do not denote a process and for which there is no implicit subject, as shown in (38):

- (38) *Cela aide (?les habitants) à la liberté d' expression.*
 this helps (the inhabitants) at/to the freedom of expression
 'This helps the freedom of speech (of the inhabitants).'

In (38), the indirect object is not a nominalized verbal predicate and the use of a direct object, which would be considered as the semantic subject of the indirect object, would be semantically incongruous, as shown by the low acceptability of the sentence with the use of the direct object *les habitants* 'the inhabitants'.

The indirect transitive constructions of pro-eventive verbs should simply be regarded as indirect transitive constructions, with the array of semantic and pragmatic constraints that they entail. Nonetheless, the semantic analysis of the indirect transitive constructions remain very close to the one suggested for the pro-eventive verbs when followed by the O à V_{inf} pattern, that is, that the grammatical meaning of à 'at/to' as the expression of an abstract goal encodes the protagonistic force expressed by the lexical semantics of the pro-eventive verbs (see section 4.6.1.). In contrast to the direct transitive constructions, the semantic import of à 'at/to' in the indirect transitive construction is

indeed the expression of an abstract goal, which can lead to a change of meaning of the verb, as the object perceived as an abstract goal leads to a figurative interpretation of the lexical semantics of the verb ((26)–(29)), to a different type of complementation with the indirect object, in contrast to the direct object, being viewed as an abstract goal ((30) and (31)), or to semantic nuances in the interpretation of the direct and indirect objects related to the notion of goal and prospection ((32) and (33)).

4.7. *VISER* ‘TO AIM’

4.7.1. Semantic characterization

The direct/indirect alternations with *viser* ‘to aim’ can be used to illustrate one of the poles of the grammatical/lexical meaning interaction continuum as it exemplifies a case for which the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ mirrors the lexical meaning of the verb. As illustrated in (39), *viser* ‘to aim’ entails the notion of goal in both the direct and indirect transitive constructions:

- (39)a. *Il vise la perfection.*
 he aims the perfection
 ‘He aims at perfection.’
- b. *Il vise à la perfection.*
 he aims at/to the perfection
 ‘He aims at perfection.’

In both the direct (39a) and the indirect (39b) constructions of *viser* ‘to aim’, the object *la perfection* ‘the perfection’ can be viewed as a goal toward which the subject *il* ‘he’ is oriented. The grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal is

therefore perfectly compatible with the lexical semantics of the verb, as it entails the notion of goal. The case of *viser* ‘to aim’ therefore illustrates one more example of the semantic correlation between the lexical semantics of the verb and the abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ (see sections 3.3.2 and 4.1.2. for further discussion).

Although the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ and *à* ‘at/to’ independently express the notion of goal, there still are meaning differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions. The expression of goal is not completely the same between the lexical meaning of *viser* ‘to aim’ and the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. Consider the following set of examples in (40) and (41):

(40)a. *Il vise la cible.*
 he aims the target
 ‘He aims at the target.’

b. ?*Il vise à la cible.*
 he aims at/to the target
 ‘He aims at the target.’

(41)a. *Son discours vise le candidat.*
 his speech aims the candidate
 ‘His speech aims at the candidate.’

b. ?*Son discours vise au candidat.*
 his speech aims at/to the candidate
 ‘His speech aims at the candidate.’

The direct transitive construction of *viser* ‘to aim’ is compatible with the object *la cible* ‘the target’ (40a), whereas the indirect one is not (40b). Similarly, in (41a), the object *le candidat* ‘the candidate’ can be viewed as the figurative target toward which the criticism

of the speech is oriented. The indirect transitive construction in (41b) also appears to be semantically incompatible with an object viewed as a target.

As discussed in sections 3.2.2 and 4.1.1, the notion of goal entails a path, that is, what directs the concrete or abstract motion from a state to another, and an endpoint, a target. The grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ implies both an abstract path and a target. In contrast, the lexical meaning of *viser* ‘to aim’ only appears to entail an endpoint, the target associated to the notion of goal. It can actually be argued that the lexical semantics of *viser* ‘to aim’ only profiles¹⁵ the Trajector and the Landmark associated with the notion of goal, as represented in Figure 4.11.

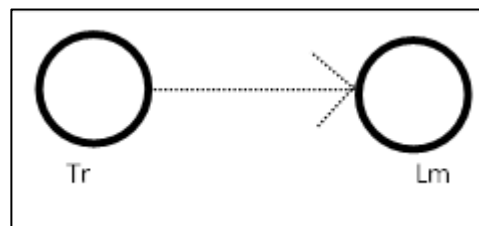


Figure 4.11: Schematization of the notion of target

In Figure 4.11, the profiling of the Trajector and the Landmark is symbolized by the heavier weight of the lines that represent the Trajector and the Landmark. In contrast to the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ (see Figure 4.1), the Landmark is not necessarily abstract, hence the solid lines in Figure 4.11. Although the path is not profiled within the lexical semantics of the verb *viser* ‘to aim’, it is implicitly part of the relationship in

¹⁵ In Cognitive Grammar, the profile is the prominence given to the substructure of a conceptual basis. For instance, *rim* profiles a portion of the conceptual basis *wheel* (see Langacker 2008: 67).

which the Trajector and the Landmark are profiled, which means that the path associated with the notion of goal can be expressed, depending on the context. In (41a), for instance, with *viser le candidat* ‘to aim at the candidate’, the path is not expressed. The construction does not entail any concrete or abstract motion. Now consider the following examples in (42):

- (42)a. *Cette politique vise l’ appauvrissement des familles.*
 this policy aims the impoverishment of the families
 ‘This policy targets/aims at the impoverishment of the families.’
- b. *Cette politique vise à l’ appauvrissement des familles.*
 this policy aims at/to the impoverishment of the families
 families
 ‘This policy aims at the impoverishment of the families.’

The sentence in (42a) is ambiguous. It can be read either as the policy targeting the impoverishment of the families, to fight against it, for instance, or as the policy aiming to impoverish the families. While the first interpretation does not imply the notion of path, that is, a change from one state to the other, the second one does, as it entails an abstract motion from the state of the families’ being less poor to the state of the families’ being poorer. With the indirect transitive construction (42b), only the second interpretation is possible. It therefore appears that *à* ‘at/to’ highlights the notion of path in the indirect transitive construction of *viser* ‘to aim’, which can account for the low acceptability of (40b) and (41b). The notion of path is not compatible with objects that only entail the profiling of the endpoint, that is, concrete or figurative targets.

The meaning difference between the direct and indirect constructions of the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ is also echoed in the difference in the type of complementation patterns with which the verb tends to be compatible, as evidenced by the corpus.

4.7.2. Corpus analysis

As discussed in section 4.7.1, in contrast to the meaning of the direct construction that entails the notion of target, the meaning of the indirect construction of the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ implies the expression of an abstract goal. In a similar fashion to the other verbs studied in this chapter, the verb in the indirect transitive construction tends to select more abstract complements (see Table 4.12).

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Nominal Phrase	153	32.69%
Animate	0	0%
Inanimate Concrete	7	1.50%
Inanimate Abstract	146	31.19%
Action	55	11.75%
Non-action	91	19.44%
Infinitival Phrase	310	66.24%
Finite-tensed Clauses	5	1.07%
TOTAL	468	100%

Table 4.12: Complementation types of *viser à* ‘to aim at’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

As shown in Table 4.12, no animate nominal phrase was found as a complementation type of *viser à* ‘to aim at’ and inanimate concrete nominal phrases

represent only 1.50% of all occurrences, in contrast to 31.19% for inanimate abstracts. It can be argued that these results are due to the abstract Landmark expressed by *à* ‘at/to’, which tends to integrate nominal phrases with more abstract referents. This is also supported by the contrast between the types of nominal complements with which the direct and indirect constructions of the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ are compatible’ (see Table 4.13).

COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	DIRECT		INDIRECT	
	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
Animate	153	22.73%	0	0%
Inanimate Concrete	121	17.98%	7	4.58%
Inanimate Abstract	399	59.29%	146	95.42%
Action	53	7.88%	55	35.94%
Non-action	346	51.41%	91	59.48%
TOTAL	673	100%	153	100%

Table 4.13: Nominal complementation types of the direct and indirect constructions of *viser* ‘to aim’ (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

Table 4.13 clearly shows a tendency for the verb in the indirect constructions to select inanimate abstract nominal complements, which represents 95.42% of all occurrences, in contrast to only 59.29% for the direct constructions. Furthermore, nominalized actions are much more frequent with indirect constructions (35.94% of nominal occurrences) than with direct constructions (7.88% of all occurrences), which can be regarded as a semantic parallel of the use of indirect transitive constructions with infinitives, which represent about two-thirds of all the complements of *viser à* ‘to aim at’ (see Table 4.12).

4.7.3. Semantic analysis

The indirect transitive construction with *viser* ‘to aim’ differs from the direct one not only in terms of meaning (see section 4.7.1), but also in terms of the types of complements with which the two constructions tend to be compatible (see section 4.7.2).

Although the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ mirrors the notion of goal expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb, its abstract characterization has a semantic import in the indirect transitive constructions. The lexical semantics of the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ can be schematically represented as the expression of the notion of target (see Figure 4.11). With the indirect construction of the verb, the structure defined by the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ integrates the Landmark expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb and, thus, the Landmark of the lexical semantics of the verb is reinterpreted as an abstract goal. The subject of the verb is oriented toward the abstract goal that the indirect object constitutes. This induces both the specification of the semantics of the structure, in the sense that the abstract path associated to *à* ‘at/to’ is profiled in the indirect transitive construction but not necessarily in the direct one (see (42)), and a lower semantic compatibility with concrete nominal phrases.

4.8. SUMMARY

In section 4.1, I defined the notion of abstract goal expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ as the orientation of a Trajector, following an abstract path, toward a Landmark that constitutes an abstract endpoint. I demonstrated that the interaction between the abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ (i.e., its grammatical meaning) and the lexical meaning of the verbs can be

represented with a continuum. One pole of the continuum represents cases for which the lexical meaning of the verb mirrors the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. The other pole represents cases for which the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ mirrors the lexical meaning of the verb.

In section 4.2, I argued that *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ illustrates the pole for which the lexical meaning of the verb mirrors the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. I demonstrated that the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of the verb has been diachronically lexicalized, to such an extent that the lexical meaning of the verb in the indirect transitive construction (*aspirer à* ‘to aspire’) fully expresses the notion of goal, which is absent from the lexical meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction (*aspirer* ‘to breathe in’).

In section 4.3, I demonstrated that, with *parer à* ‘to guard against’, the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ conditions the lexical meaning of the verb, but at a lesser degree than with *aspirer à* ‘to aspire’. The notion of goal expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ is only a part of the lexical meaning of the verb in the indirect transitive construction. I showed that the goal that the meaning of *parer à* ‘to guard against’ expresses is actually the lexical meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction (*parer* ‘to ward off’).

In section 4.4, I examined the argument alternations of *voir* ‘to see/to see to’ and *regarder* ‘to look at/to pay attention to’ for which the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ conditions the lexical meaning of the verb to a lesser extent than with *parer à* ‘to guard against’. I demonstrated that the meaning difference between the direct and indirect

transitive constructions of these verbs can be accounted for in relation to the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal.

In section 4.5, I focused on two verbs, *veiller* ‘to watch (over)’ and *travailler* ‘to work’, for which the interaction between the lexical meaning of the verb and the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized as neutral. I demonstrated that the overall meaning of their indirect transitive constructions is composed of the lexical meaning of the verbs used intransitively and of the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’.

In section 4.6, I studied a class of verbs, which I labeled pro-eventive, that share the common property of being followed by the O *à* V_{inf} pattern. I demonstrated that the lexical meanings of the verbs condition the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal in the O *à* V_{inf} pattern and that, in the cases of argument alternations of the pro-eventive verbs, the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ is comparable to the one in the O *à* V_{inf} pattern.

In section 4.7, I examined the argument alternations of *viser* ‘to aim’, for which the lexical meaning of the verb conditions the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ at a higher degree than with the pro-eventive verbs, as the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ mirrors the notion of goal expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb. I demonstrated that, while the notion of path is not profiled in the notion of goal expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb, it is profiled in the indirect transitive constructions of the verb and I argued that the profiling of the notion of path in the indirect transitive constructions results from the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal.

Chapter 5: À ‘at/to’ and the Expression of Localization in Argument Alternations

In this chapter, I study the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract localization in some cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations. I demonstrate that *à* ‘at/to’ marks the indirect object as an abstract localization, a reference point, and that the meaning differences between the two constructions of a given verb, albeit sometimes subtle, result from the notion of abstract localization.

In section 5.1, I first define the concept of abstract localization and characterize in general terms the semantic differences it creates between the direct and indirect transitive constructions. In order to evaluate the specific semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer, I study cases of alternations (*réussir* ‘to succeed’; *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’) that involve localization but which do not represent cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations similar to the other verbs of this chapter given that *réussir* ‘to succeed’ presents a case of intransitive/transitive alternation and *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’, alternations with various prepositions (section 5.2). I then focus on cases of direct/indirect transitive alternations for which a change of lexical meaning can be observed, either in terms of lexical specification, that is, with a clear divergence of meaning (i.e., *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’), or in terms of metaphorical extension (i.e., *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’; *tenir* ‘to hold’), which I account for in relation to the role of *à* ‘at/to’ (section 5.3). I finally provide an analysis of the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer for the cases of direct/indirect argument alternations of 4 verbs: *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ (section 5.4), *contredire* ‘to contradict’ (section 5.5), *insulter* ‘to

insult’ (section 5.6) and *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ (section 5.7). I summarize my findings in section 5.8.

5.1. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

5.1.1. Abstract localization

As observed in section 3.1.1, Melis (2001) characterizes the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer, which does not specify any topographic dimensions of its complement and requires that the complement be associated with background information. Consider the examples given in (1):

- (1) a. *Je suis au bar.*
I am at/to.the bar
‘I am at the bar.’
- b. *Je suis dans le bar.*
I am in the bar
‘I am in the bar.’
- c. *?Je suis à un bar.*
I am at/to a bar
‘I am at a bar.’
- d. *Je suis dans un bar.*
I am in a bar.
‘I am in a bar.’

In an utterance such as the one illustrated in (1a), the topographic dimension of the complement *le bar* ‘the bar’ is not highlighted. The speaker could be inside the bar or outside the bar. In contrast, with a more specific spatial preposition, such as *dans* ‘in’, the topographic dimension of the complement is highlighted. In (1b), the speaker specifies

her exact position in relation to the complement *le bar* ‘the bar’; she is *inside* the bar and not outside. As a general localizer, *à* ‘at/to’ has a low level of compatibility with indefinite nominal phrases, as shown in (1c) (see Borillo 2001, *inter alia*). The abstract semantics of the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ (see section 3.2.2), in comparison to more concrete spatial prepositions such as *dans* ‘in’, appears to be compatible with definite complements that are associated with background information. In (1a), indeed, the complement can refer to a bar that has been mentioned in context or the bar where the speaker usually goes. In (1d), the indefinite nominal phrase *un bar* ‘a bar’ does not entail any background information and is compatible with a more specific spatial preposition (i.e., *dans* ‘in’), in contrast to *à* ‘at/to’¹⁶ in (1c).

The schema of the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer is represented in Figure 5.1. As a preposition, *à* ‘at/to’ expresses a profiling relationship between the Trajector and the Landmark (Langacker 2008: 116). The general localization expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ is represented by the arrow, which both delineates the localization of the Trajector in relation to the Landmark and excludes the topographic dimension of the Landmark. The fact that the Landmark is associated with background information is represented by the grounding (G) of the nominal phrases (i.e., the box) within the Landmark. The schema also posits that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as a spatial preposition is static, that it does not entail motion. Following Vandeloise (1987), it can indeed be

¹⁶ An indefinite nominal phrase is compatible with *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer when it is contextually specified, that is, contextually grounded (e.g., *?Il va à une école*. ‘?He goes to a school.’; *Il va à une école pour handicapés*. ‘He goes to a school for the disabled.’). These latter examples provide more evidence that *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer is only compatible with grounded nominal phrases.

argued that the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ expresses a static localization and that this static localization is anticipated with motion verbs (see section 3.2.2).

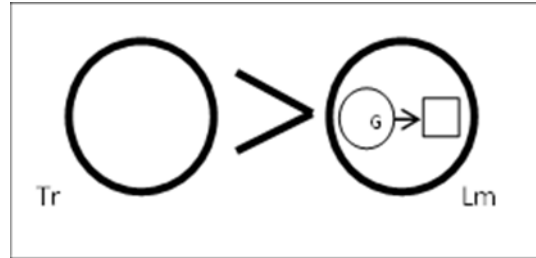


Figure 5.1: Schema of *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer

The schema of the spatial preposition *à* ‘at/to’ represented in Figure 5.1 can be used as a conceptual basis for the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer observed in the cases of argument alternations of the verbs studied in this chapter. The abstract localization expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ in this context can be roughly interpreted as “in relation to” and can be viewed as a profiling relationship between the Trajector and the Landmark. In contrast to general localization, abstract localization does not entail any spatial dimension of the Landmark. The Trajector is not profiled in relation to a Landmark that can be assimilated to a physical place, but to a Landmark that can only be viewed as an abstract “place”, an abstract reference point¹⁷. The concept of abstract localization can be thus defined as the profiling of a Trajector in relation to a Landmark viewed as an abstract reference point. In other words, the Landmark specifies a frame for interpreting the lexical meaning of the verb.

¹⁷ The notion of reference point in this study is to be understood in its usual sense and not as the concept of reference point defined by Langacker (2008, *inter alia*).

The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer is represented in Figure 5.2. The Trajector is profiled in relation to the Landmark through the dashed arrow, representing the abstract localization. The schema in Figure 5.2 is based on the one in Figure 5.1. While the solid arrow symbolizes a spatial localization in Figure 5.1, the dashed lines in Figure 5.2 symbolize the profiling of a Trajector in relation to an abstract reference point. Note that, unlike *à* ‘at/to’ as a general localizer, *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer does not require the Landmark to be grounded.

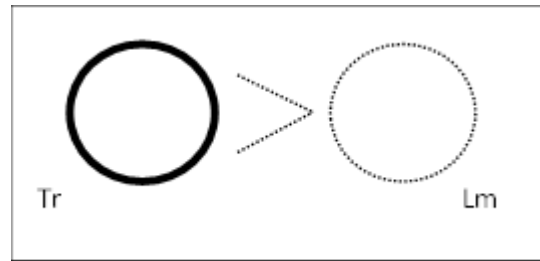


Figure 5.2: Schema of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer

As discussed in section 3.3.2, the different senses of *à* ‘at/to’ can be subsumed under two main categories: the dynamic and the static uses of the preposition (see Gougenheim 1959, *inter alia*). The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer can be characterized as one of the static uses of *à* ‘at/to’. In contrast to the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal (see Chapter 4), which illustrates one of the dynamic uses, *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer does not entail any motion, concrete or abstract.

Furthermore, the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer is more grammatical than that of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal. On the lexical/grammatical

continuum defined by Langacker (1991) (see section 2.1.1), the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer is closer to the grammatical pole than the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal. As seen in Chapter 4, there is an interaction between the notion of abstract goal and the lexical semantics of a given verb, meaning that *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal can condition the interpretation of the lexical meaning of a given verb. Unlike *à* ‘at/to’ as expressing an abstract goal, which can play a role at the lexical level, *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer has a purely grammatical meaning and has no influence on the lexical meaning of the verb. The semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer therefore lies at a structural level, as part of the meaning of the whole construction. The semantic differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of a given verb thus result from the difference between the meaning of the direct transitive construction (i.e., the lexical meaning of the verb is viewed as a transfer of energy from the Trajector to the Landmark) and the meaning of the indirect transitive construction (i.e., the lexical meaning of the verb is understood in relation to an abstract reference point, the Landmark).

5.1.2. Direct and indirect transitivity

Langacker (1987a) views actions and events as action chains that entail the transfer of energy from a source to a recipient (see section 2.1.2). This conception of actions and events is actually comparable to the semantic definition of prototypical transitivity provided by other linguists (Desclés 1998; Lazard 1998, *inter alia*). Lazard (1998: 121) defines prototypical transitivity as the expression of an action carried out by

an agent on a patient that is effectively affected by it. If the concept of transfer of energy can be viewed as a metaphorical interpretation of the carrying out of an action from an agent to a patient, Lazard's (1998) model of transitivity differs from Langacker's (1987a, 1991, 2008) in the sense that the former includes the notion of affectedness.

As discussed in section 2.2.3, the notion of affectedness is a central concept used not only to define prototypical transitivity, but also to account for argument alternations (see Beavers 2010). Given that both the notions of transitivity and affectedness are often viewed as scalar in the literature (see section 2.2.3), it can be postulated that the various levels of affectedness correlate with various levels of energy transferred in an action chain, which consequently implies a scalar approach to the notion of energy. Consider the following examples:

- (2) a. They destroyed the house.
b. They saw the house.

The event denoted in (2a) can easily be interpreted as entailing a higher level of energy than the one in (2b). This difference in levels of energy can be accounted for by the fact that the energy entailed in (2a) is more physical and perceivable, whereas the energy entailed in (2b) is more abstract and less perceivable. The various levels of energy involved in an event can thus be accounted for through a continuum from physical energy, the highest level of energy, to energy conceptualized at a more abstract level, the lowest level of energy.

Although it could be argued that the event in (2b) does not entail any transfer of energy, this view would be problematic within the Cognitive Grammar framework.

Langacker (2008) claims that transitivity correlates with the ability to passivize (2008: 387) (see also Rice 1987) and characterizes the subject of a passive clause as the recipient of energy (2008: 396). Consider the data given in (3) and (4):

- (3) a. Peter saw Mary.
b. Mary was seen by Peter.
- (4) a. Peter resembled Mary.
b. *Mary was resembled by Peter.

As shown in (3), the verb *to see* can be passivized in English (3b), while the verb *to resemble*, although it is syntactically transitive (4a), cannot (4b). Passivization can be used as a test to determine whether a verb entails energy or not. Based on this test, it can be argued that the verb *to see* entails a very low degree of energy, conceptualized at an abstract level, and that the verb *to resemble* does not. At the lowest levels of the energy continuum, the notion of energy is consequently not to be understood *sensu stricto*, but rather as an abstract construal based on the more concrete energy involved in prototypical transitivity.

It can be posited that the level of energy involved in an event can be measured out in relation to the source of the energy, that is, how much energy is emitted, and the recipient of the energy, that is, how much is received, and consequently, how affected the recipient is. As discussed in section 2.2.2, Beavers (2011) presents affectedness as a scalar notion defined in relation to the specificity of the change entailed by the object. Consider the examples given in (5):

- (5) a. He destroyed the wall.
b. He hit the wall.
c. He saw the wall.

In (5a), which illustrates an example of specified change (Beavers 2010), the direct object *the wall* is associated with a mental representation in which the referent has necessarily undergone a change. The lexical semantics therefore entails a high level of energy from a source to a patient that necessarily results in the affectedness of the object. The representation of this event is therefore close to the model of prototypical transitivity defined by Langacker (1987a, 1991, 2008). In (5b), which exemplifies potential change (Beavers 2010), the representation of the event involves the emission of energy from a source, the agent, but the level of energy received by the recipient, which transpires through the nature of the change undergone by the recipient, is left unspecified, in the sense that the referent of *the wall* may or may not have undergone a change and that, consequently, the level of energy can be viewed as lower with a recipient that does not necessarily undergo a change than with a recipient that systematically undergoes a change. In (5c), illustrating unspecified change (Beavers 2010), the level of energy involved can be regarded as minimal or null, given that the event does not entail any physical contact between the source and the recipient or any type of change undergone by the referent of *the wall*. Although the representation of the event denoted in (5c) is far from the model of prototypical transitivity, it does not necessarily mean that the semantics of the direct transitive construction of the verb is not conceptually based on the model of prototypical transitivity.

As argued by Langacker (1987a, 1991, 2008), there is a systematic correspondence between meaning and structure, which means that there needs to be an

adequation between the lexical semantics of the verb and the meaning of the structure.

Consider the following sets of examples:

- (6) a. He slept.
b. *He slept Peter.
- (7) a. The vase broke.
b. Peter broke the vase.

In (6), it can be argued that the lexical meaning of the verb entails only one participant, which can account for the acceptability of the use of an intransitive structure in (6a) and the unacceptability of the use of a direct transitive structure in (6b). In (7), on the other hand, it is the meaning of the structure that influences the representation of the event. While the cause of the event of breaking is omitted with the intransitive structure in (7a), it is expressed with the direct transitive one in (7b). These examples show not only that there can be a mutual interaction between lexical and grammatical meanings (see section 4.1), but also that there needs to be a convergence between lexical and grammatical meanings. The different meaning components of the direct transitive structure (i.e., source, recipient, transfer of energy) can both entail or be entailed by lexical meaning. It appears therefore necessary to determine how the lexical meaning of the verb and the meaning components of the direct transitive structure interact and converge, that is, how the lexical meaning specifies and is compatible with the source, the recipient and the transfer of energy associated with the grammatical meaning of the direct transitive structure and how the grammatical meaning of the structure conditions the representation of the lexical meaning. Subsequently, any direct transitive use of a verb should be accounted for in relation to the meaning of prototypical transitivity, however far from the

prototype the meaning of the transitive structure associated with the lexical meaning of a given verb may be.

In the cases of argument alternations under scrutiny in this chapter, I demonstrate how the use of the direct and indirect transitive constructions conditions the interpretation of the lexical meaning of the verb. The meaning of the direct transitive structure involves a transfer of energy from a source to a recipient, which is relative to a certain level. The level of energy involved in the event and the affectedness of the object depend on the lexical meaning of the verb. Both the level of energy and affectedness need to be evaluated in relation to each verb. Indeed, the energy and the affectedness involved in an event should be viewed as an abstraction based on the specific nature of the event. For instance, the energy involved in the lexical meaning of *to break* can be viewed as a breaking force and the one in *to smash* as a smashing force, which respectively entail a difference in the way the object is affected (i.e., a broken item vs. a smashed item). It consequently appears necessary to determine what constitutes the energy and the affectedness involved in the direct transitive structure. In the case of argument alternations, each construction corresponds to a different meaning and the correspondence between the lexical meaning of the verb and the meaning of the construction varies accordingly. In other words, the distinct meanings of the direct and indirect transitive constructions condition a different interpretation of the lexical semantics of the verb.

The schema in Figure 5.3 represents the symbolic meaning of the direct transitive construction. A source (the subject) emits an energy that is transferred to a recipient (the

direct object), which is potentially affected by the energy. It is therefore necessary to determine the correspondence between the lexical meaning of the verb and the various components of the schema, that is, to specify the type and level of energy and affectedness involved by the meaning of the direct transitive construction.

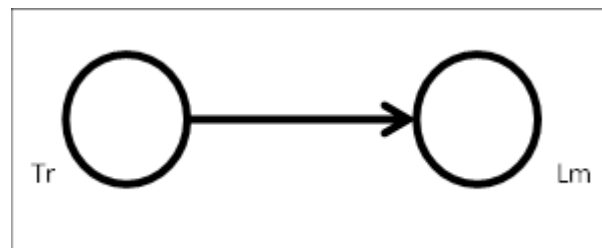


Figure 5.3: Schematization of a direct transitive construction (based on Figure 11.2, in Langacker 2008: 374)

The schema in Figure 5.4 represents the symbolic meaning of the indirect transitive construction with *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer. The meaning of the indirect transitive construction thus differs from the meaning of the direct one in the sense that the emission of energy from the source (the subject) is not directly transferred to a recipient, but profiled through the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer in relation to a Landmark (the indirect object). I argue that the meaning of the indirect transitive construction therefore encodes a disruption in the transfer of energy. In this construction, the indirect object cannot be viewed as a recipient, which has consequences on the level of affectedness of the object. The referent of the indirect object is not viewed as being

directly affected by the energy emitted from the source but conceptualized as a reference point.

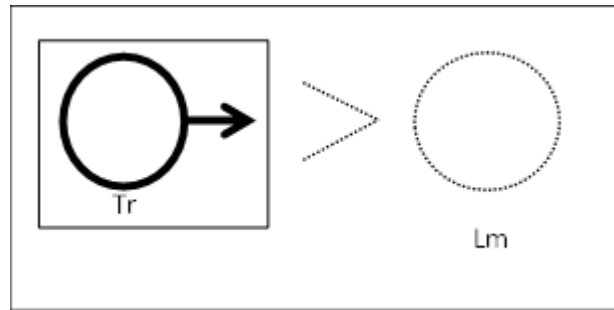


Figure 5.4: Schematization of the indirect transitive construction with *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer

The contrast in meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions thus implies that the Landmark of the indirect transitive construction is viewed as a reference point and that it entails less affectedness than the Landmark of the direct transitive construction. These theoretical assumptions are supported by the subsequent analyses of the verbs showing cases of argument alternations in which the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be described as an abstract localizer.

5.2. VERB ALTERNATIONS AND LOCALIZATION

In this section, I focus on the cases of the intransitive/transitive alternations of *réussir* ‘to succeed’ (section 5.2.1) and of the direct/indirect transitive alternations of *habiter* ‘to inhabit’ (section 5.2.2), in order to support some of the theoretical claims

made in the previous section and to point out the meaning differences observed among verbs that show cases of alternations involving localization in general.

5.2.1. *Réussir* ‘to succeed’

The verb *réussir* ‘to succeed’ exhibits a case of intransitive/transitive alternation that could easily be interpreted as a case of direct/indirect transitive alternation, as illustrated in (8):

- (8) a. *Il a réussi l’ examen.*
 he has succeeded the exam
 ‘He passed the exam.’
- b. *Il a réussi à l’ examen.*
 he has succeeded at/to the exam
 ‘He passed the exam.’

The contrast between the construction in (8a) and the one in (8b) could indeed, at first glance, be assimilated to a case of direct/indirect transitive alternation. The use of *réussir* ‘to succeed’ in (8b) is, however, intransitive as shown by the following examples (9):

- (9) a. *À l’ examen, il a bien réussi.*
 at/to the exam he has well succeeded
 ‘At the exam, he did well.’
- b. *?À la loi, il obéit.*
 at/to the law he obeys
 ‘?The law, he obeys.’
- c. *Il était absent à l’ examen.*
 he was absent at/to the exam
 ‘He was absent at the exam.’

- d. *Il a réussi dans la vie.*
 he has succeeded in the life
 ‘He succeeded in life.’
- e. *?Il a réussi à la maison.*
 he has succeeded at/to the house
 ‘?He succeeded at the house.’

As shown in (9a), the syntactic behavior of the prepositional phrase *à l’examen* ‘at the exam’ is different from prepositional phrases that are arguments, in the sense that its fronting does not lead to a low acceptability of the sentence. In contrast, in (9b), the fronting of the indirect object *à la loi* ‘(at/to) the law’, an argument of the verb *obéir* ‘to obey’, leads to a low acceptability of the sentence (see Tellier 1995, *inter alia*). The prepositional phrase *à l’examen* ‘at the exam’ can therefore be characterized as an adjunct, as a localization adverbial, and is actually used as such in other contexts (9c). The intransitive construction of *réussir* ‘to succeed’ can also be followed by other prepositional phrases, as shown in (9d). It should be noted that the intransitive constructions is only compatible with localization adverbials for which the notion of success can easily be understood. The adverbial needs to be conceptualized as a frame in relation to which the verb can be interpreted. This property explains why *à la maison* ‘at the house’ in (9e), for which the notion of success is not obvious, is not compatible with the intransitive construction and adverbials such as *à l’examen* ‘at the exam’ or *dans la vie* ‘in life’ are.

Lexicographers do not point out any semantic difference between the transitive construction in (8a) and the intransitive construction in (8b) (for instance, *TLFi*). The

verb *réussir* ‘to succeed’ is originally intransitive and some French prescriptive grammarians condemn the transitive use of the verb with the direct object, even though the two constructions are well accepted in contemporary standard French (see Dupré 1971).

On the semantic difference between the transitive (8a) and intransitive (8b) constructions, Dupré (1971) notes that the transitive use of the verb means *faire avec succès* ‘to do/make something with success’ and that it should be avoided with *examen* ‘exam’, given that *réussir un examen* ‘to pass an exam’ does not entail *faire un examen* ‘to do/make an exam’. The direct transitive construction appears to entail an affectedness of its object that can indeed be defined in terms of success. Consider the examples given in (10):

- (10) a. *Il a réussi son livre.*
he has succeeded his book
‘He made a success of his book.’
- b. *?Il a réussi à son livre.*
he has succeeded at/to his book
‘He made a success of his book.’

The direct transitive construction of the verb *réussir* ‘to succeed’ in (10a) entails that the book was “done/made with success”. The abstract affectedness of the direct object can be specified as the attribution of the semantic feature [SUCCESS], through which it is understood that the referent of the direct object is a success. Similarly, in (8a), the direct transitive construction *réussir l’examen* ‘to pass the exam’ entails that the exam was a success. With the intransitive use of *réussir* ‘to succeed’ in *réussir à l’examen* ‘to pass the exam’ in (10b), there is a difference in the profiling of the event. The intransitive use

of *réussir* means ‘to succeed’ and the use of the localization adverbial *à l’examen* ‘at the exam’ specifies the domain in which the notion of success expressed by the intransitive verb applies. The adverbial can be viewed as a referential frame to which the meaning of the verb applies. In other words, the subject’s success is understood in relation to the setting expressed by the adverbial *à l’examen* ‘at the exam’. This semantic property of the construction can account for the low acceptability of (10b), in which *à son livre* ‘at/to his book’ cannot be regarded as a localization adverbial and, therefore, as a setting specifying the domain in which the subject’s success applies.

The case of alternation observed for *réussir* ‘to succeed’ displays similarities with the cases of direct/indirect transitive alternation with *à* ‘at/to’ expressing abstract localization. The direct transitive construction entails the affectedness of the object; the prepositional phrase in the indirect transitive construction can be viewed as a reference point in relation to which the meaning of the verb is interpreted. The main difference between these two types of alternations lies in the syntactic nature of the reference point. With *réussir* ‘to succeed’, the referential frame is an adjunct, a localization adverbial, and not an argument¹⁸.

5.2.2. *Habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’

The verb *habiter* ‘to inhabit’ exhibits a case of direct/indirect transitive alternation different from the one with *à* ‘at/to’ expressing abstract localization. The indirect

¹⁸ Note that this analysis is not applicable to constructions in which *réussir* ‘to succeed’ is followed by *à* ‘at/to’ and an infinitive (i.e., *réussir à faire quelque chose* ‘to manage to do something’). These types of constructions are not related to the phenomenon examined in this section and require their own study.

transitive construction of the verb is compatible with prepositional phrases that entail a spatial localization¹⁹, as illustrated in (11):

- (11) a. *Il habite Paris.*
 he lives/inhabits Paris
 ‘He lives in Paris.’
- b. *Il habite à Paris.*
 he lives/inhabits at/to Paris
 ‘He lives in Paris.’
- c. *Il habite dans Paris.*
 he lives/inhabits in Paris
 ‘He lives inside Paris.’

The verb *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ can indeed be used either in a direct transitive construction (11a) or in an indirect transitive construction with prepositional phrases that express a spatial localization, as in (11b) and (11c). In contrast to *réussir* ‘to succeed’, the prepositional phrase is an argument of the verb, as shown in (12):

- (12) a. *?À Paris, ils n’ ont pas habité longtemps.*
 at/to Paris they not have not lived/inhabited long time
 ‘?In Paris, they didn’t live for a very long time.’
- b. *À Paris, ils n’ y ont pas habité longtemps.*
 at/to Paris they not there have not lived/inhabited long time
 ‘?In Paris, they didn’t live there for a very long time.’

In (12a), the fact that the fronting of the prepositional phrase leads to the low acceptability of the sentence, in contrast to the fronting with the use of the resumptive

¹⁹ Note that, in this section, I focus on the meaning differences between the direct construction of *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ and the indirect one that can be introduced by different prepositions. I consequently do not only deal with the prepositional phrases introduced by *à* ‘at/to’.

pronoun *y* ‘there’ (12b), can be used as evidence to support the claim that the prepositional phrase is an argument of the verb (see Tellier 1995: 77, *inter alia*).

As noted by Melis (2001: 36), the semantic difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb is very subtle. Dupré (1971) observes that the direct construction is generally used to provide information and the indirect one, with any prepositional phrase, has a descriptive function. The prepositional phrase can indeed be viewed as more descriptive, in the sense that it specifies the type of localization of the subject in reference to her dwelling place. The specificity of the type of localization is shown by the contrast between (11b) and (11c), in which the use of *à* ‘at/to’ expresses a general localization (11b), whereas the use of *dans* ‘in’ (11c) specifies that the subject lives inside Paris and not in the periphery of the city. In fact, the difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions generally appears to be related to the nature of information, as illustrated by (13) and (14):

(13)a. *Où est-ce qu’il habite?*
 where is it that he lives/inhabits
 ‘Where does he live?’

b. *?Qu’est-ce qu’il habite?*
 what is it that he lives/inhabits
 ‘?What does he inhabit?’

(14)a. *Il habite une maison /dans une maison.*
 he lives/inhabits a house in a house
 ‘He lives in a house.’

b. *Il habite ?une voiture /dans une voiture.*
 he lives/inhabits a car in a car
 ‘He lives in a car.’

As shown by the difference of acceptability between (13a) and (13b), the nature of information plays a role in the speaker's choice between the two constructions. The indirect transitive construction appears to be used when new information is involved. In questions, preference is given to the use of an interrogative word calling for a prepositional phrase (i.e., *où* 'where' (13a)) rather than for a nominal phrase (i.e., *que* 'what' in (13b)). In other words, the indirect transitive construction is preferred to the direct one to ask for new information. Furthermore, if the two constructions are acceptable with common dwelling places (14a), only the indirect one appears to be compatible with nouns referring to less common dwelling places, like *une voiture* 'a car' (14b). This example shows that information related to common knowledge is acceptable with the direct construction and information that can be characterized as uncommon, less acceptable.

The difference between the two constructions is not only related to the nature of information. There also appear to be semantic differences related to the overall meanings of the constructions. Both Herslund (1988: 55) and Melis (2001: 36) point out that there tends to be a "holistic" (see Anderson 1971, 1977) reading of the object with the direct transitive construction, which is not the case with the indirect transitive construction, as illustrated in (15):

- (15) a. *Il habite le château.*
 he lives/inhabits the castle
 'He lives in the castle.'
- b. *Il habite dans le château.*
 he lives/inhabits in the castle
 'He lives in the castle.'

As observed by Melis (2001: 36), the direct transitive construction in (15a) entails that the whole castle is viewed as the subject's dwelling place, while the indirect transitive construction in (15b) may suggest that there are other people living in the castle or that there are some sort of other activities happening in the castle. Herslund (1988: 55) compares this property to the one observed with direct objects in the *charger* 'to load' argument alternation (16):

- (16) a. *Ils ont chargé le camion de bouteilles.*
 they have loaded the truck of bottles
 'They loaded the truck with bottles.'
- b. *Ils ont chargé les bouteilles dans le camion.*
 they have loaded the bottles in the truck
 'They loaded the bottles into the truck.'

In the locative alternation illustrated in (16a) and (16b), the direct object is associated with completeness, in the sense that, in (16a), the whole truck is viewed as being loaded with bottles (the truck is full), whereas in (16b), all the bottles are viewed as being loaded into the truck (the truck might not be full). Beavers (2006) correlates the use of the direct object in the locative alternation to the notion of total affectedness. He also demonstrates that the degree of affectedness is lower with the oblique argument, which entails affectedness, than with the direct one, which entails total affectedness (see section 2.2.2). For instance, in (16a), the use of *le camion* 'the truck' as a direct object entails that the truck is fully loaded, which is not the case with the use of *dans le camion* 'in the truck' in (16b), which only entails that the truck was loaded. This property results from the more general Morphosyntactic Alignment Principle (Beavers 2010: 848), which stipulates that,

for verbs displaying a direct/oblique argument alternation, the oblique argument entails less affectedness than the direct argument (see sections 2.2.2 and 5.1.2).

In the case of the argument alternations of *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’, the meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb can be argued to result from a difference in the profiling of the state denoted by the lexical meaning of the verb. In the two constructions, the subject entails an array of semantic properties as “the occupier of a place as a dwelling place”. This array of properties can be viewed as what defines the abstract energy implied by the transitive nature of the verb. As argued in section 5.1.2, transitive verbs involve a transfer of energy that needs to be specified in relation to the lexical meaning of the verb. In the case of the stative verb *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’, this energy is abstract and minimal and can be defined in relation to the semantic entailments of its source, the subject. In the direct transitive construction, the transfer of energy between its source, the subject/Trajector, and its recipient, the direct object/Landmark, is direct, as represented in Figure 5.5. The subject/Trajector is located within the object/Landmark, interpreted as the Trajector’s dwelling place. This profiling entails a direct relationship between the Trajector and the Landmark, in the sense that no other elements are profiled in relation to the Landmark and that, consequently, the Landmark as a whole is conceived as the dwelling place.

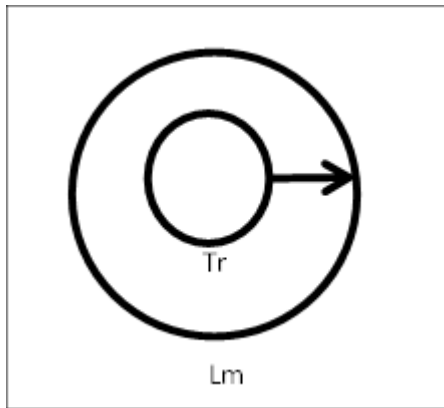


Figure 5.5: Schematization of the direct transitive construction of *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’

In contrast, in Figure 5.6, the indirect transitive construction results from the integration of the meaning expressed by the subject and the verb into the Trajector associated with the preposition *dans* ‘in’ (i.e., the box in Figure 5.6). The Trajector of *dans* ‘in’ is thus viewed as a setting localized within the Landmark, which does not necessarily entail that the whole Landmark is “inhabited”. The setting corresponding to the meaning of the subject and the verb is simply localized within the Landmark as any other elements can be.

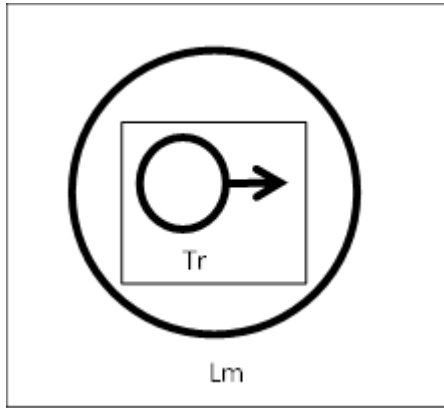


Figure 5.6: Schematization of the indirect transitive construction of *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ with *dans* ‘in’

This difference in the representations of the state denoted by *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ also leads to semantic differences associated with the lexical semantics of the verb. With the indirect transitive construction, the use of the preposition correlates with focusing on the dwelling place, as it specifies the localization of the Trajector in relation to the Landmark. The focusing on the dwelling place can account for why the indirect construction is used with objects that can be described as foreground information. The focusing on the dwelling place entails that the notion of dwelling place entailed in the lexical semantics of the verb is emphasized. Consider the following examples (17):

- (17)a. *Le désir habite sa conscience.*
 the desire lives/inhabits his conscience
 ‘Desire inhabits his conscience.’
- b. *?Le désir habite dans sa conscience.*
 the desire lives/inhabits in his conscience
 ‘?Desire lives in his conscience.’

The metaphorical use of *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ is more compatible with the direct transitive construction (17a) than with the indirect one (17b). The fact that the notion of dwelling place is emphasized in the indirect transitive construction can account for the low acceptability of (17b), as *sa conscience* ‘his conscience’ can hardly be interpreted as a dwelling place. Conversely, with the use of the direct transitive construction, only the notion of occupying a place appears to be emphasized, which can account for the acceptability of the direct construction with objects referring to metaphorical places.

The case of the alternations of the verbs *réussir* ‘to succeed’ and *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ illustrates meaning differences that are related to a contrast between the meaning of the direct transitive construction of a given verb and either the intransitive construction of this verb (*réussir* ‘to succeed’) or the indirect transitive one (*habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’). The alternation cases of *réussir* ‘to succeed’ and *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ thus exhibit meaning differences that are to be found with other verbs under scrutiny in this chapter (see sections 5.4, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7). These meaning differences, however, differ from the verbs *réussir* ‘to succeed’ and *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ as they do involve abstract localization.

5.3. ARGUMENT ALTERNATIONS AND CHANGE OF MEANING

In this section, I focus on the cases of argument alternations for which *à* ‘at/to’ signals a lexical specification, that is, a clear distinction of meaning, between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of a given verb. After dealing with the case of *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’, for which *à* ‘at/to’ does not express abstract localization and

marks lexical specification (section 5.3.1), I demonstrate how the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ encodes a metaphorization of the lexical meaning of the verb when used in an indirect transitive construction (section 5.3.2).

5.3.1. Lexical specification

The verb *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’ exhibits a lexical specification between the direct transitive construction of the verb (*assister* ‘to assist’) and the indirect one (*assister à* ‘to attend’). Similarly to the case of *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’ (see section 4.2.1), the lexical specification of the verb in the two constructions is such that it could easily be viewed as a case of homonymy, as illustrated in (18):

- (18) a. *Il assiste le professeur.*
he assists the professor
‘He assists the professor.’
- b. *Il assiste à un concert.*
he assists at/to a concert
‘He attends a concert.’

The two constructions almost seem to signal the use of two different lexemes, two homonyms, that is, the lexeme *assister* meaning ‘to assist’ in the direct transitive construction (18a) and the lexeme *assister* meaning ‘to attend’ in the indirect one (18b). The difference in meaning, however, cannot be truly considered as pointing to a case of true homonymy, not only because the different meanings result from the diachronic divergence of a common meaning (‘to be present (near someone/at something)’ *TLFi*), but also because there still appears to be a synchronic semantic overlap between the two senses of the verb. While the meaning of the indirect transitive construction of the verb

can be glossed as ‘to be present’, the meaning of the direct one can be interpreted as ‘to be present to help someone’.

The cases of argument alternations of *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’ differ from the other cases studied in this chapter for two main reasons. First, the difference in meaning between the two constructions cannot be only correlated to the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’. The use of *à* ‘at/to’ only appears to signal a specialized sense of the lexeme *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’. Second, the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in this context differs from the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of either a general localization or an abstract one.

The meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ with *assister* ‘to attend’ can be indeed described in terms of event localization, that is, the localization of a Trajector in relation to a Landmark that refers to an event²⁰. The use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of event localization can be viewed as different from the one of general localization (see section 5.1.1), not only because the Landmark refers to an event, but also because it does not imply any background information, as shown by the contrast between (19a) and (19b):

- (19) a. *Je suis à un concert /une réunion /une projection.*
 I am at/to a concert a meeting a screening
 ‘I am at a concert/a meeting/a screening.’
- b. *Je suis à ?une salle de concert /?une maison /?un cinéma.*
 I am at/to a room of concert a house a
 cinema
 ‘I am at a concert hall/a house/a movie theatre.’

²⁰ In this chapter, the term *event* is to be understood in its common sense, that is, as a planned social or public occasion.

While the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of event localization is compatible with indefinite complements (19a), the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of general localization requires its complement to be associated with some sort of background information, hence the low acceptability of (19b) (see section 5.1.1).

The lexical meaning of *assister* ‘to attend’ used in indirect transitive constructions appears to be only compatible with *à* ‘at/to’ when it serves as the expression of event localization, as illustrated in (20):

- (20) *Il a assisté à un concert /?une salle de concert.*
 he has assisted at/to a concert a room of concert
 ‘He attended a concert/?a concert hall.’

As shown in (20), the indirect transitive construction of *assister* ‘to attend’ is only compatible with nominal phrases that refer to an event, hence the incompatibility with *une salle de concert* ‘a concert hall’.

The case of argument alternations of *assister* ‘to attend/to assist’ illustrates an example in which *à* ‘at/to’ as an event localizer encodes lexical specification. With *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer, the cases of change in meaning observed are more related to a process of metaphorization than of lexical specification.

5.3.2. Metaphorization

The value of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer with the verbs *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ and *tenir* ‘to hold’ appears to lead to metaphorical extensions of the lexical

meaning of the verbs used in direct transitive constructions, as illustrated by (21) and (22):

- (21)a. *Il a souscrit le contrat.*
he has subscribed the contract
'He subscribed/signed the contract.'
- b. *Il a souscrit au contrat.*
he has subscribed at/to.the contract
'He subscribed to/approved of the contract.'
- (22)a. *Il tient sa montre.*
he holds his watch
'He is holding his watch.'
- b. *Il tient à sa montre.*
he holds at.to his watch
'He is attached to his watch.'

While the verb *souscrire* 'to subscribe' used in a direct transitive construction refers to the concrete act of putting one's signature on a document (21a), it highlights the notion of approval in the indirect transitive construction (21b). In (21b), the contract may or may not have been signed. Similarly, the sense of *tenir* 'to hold' in the direct transitive construction refers to a concrete act (22a), whereas the sense of *tenir* 'to hold' with *à* 'at/to' refers to emotional attachment (22b).

From a diachronic viewpoint, the verb *souscrire* 'to subscribe' originally meant 'to put one's signature at the end of a document to approve it' and was direct transitive (TLFi). There appears to have been a metaphorical extension of the meaning of the verb at the end of the 16th century, through which, in some contexts, only the notion of approval has been kept. At a synchronic level, the value of *à* 'at/to' as an abstract

localizer with the verb appears to encode the metaphorical extended meaning of approval, as illustrated in (23):

- (23) a. *Je souscris à cette idée.*
 I subscribe at/to this idea
 ‘I subscribe to/approve of this idea.’
- b. *?Je souscris cette idée.*
 I subscribe this idea
 ‘?I subscribe/sign this idea.’

While the indirect transitive construction of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ is perfectly compatible with a noun phrase such as *cette idée* ‘this idea’ (23a), the direct one is not (23b). The direct transitive use of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ entails the concrete act of signing and can only be compatible with direct objects for which the act of signing makes sense (i.e., *un contrat* ‘a contract’, *un traité* ‘a treaty’).

As discussed in section 5.1.2, the direct transitive construction of the verb implies a transfer of energy that can be correlated with various degrees of affectedness of the object, corresponding to a difference in the nature of the change affecting the object (see Beavers 2011). In the case of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’, the nature of the change affecting the object can be specified in relation to the act of signing. *Souscrire un contrat* ‘to subscribe/sign a contract’, for instance, entails that a legally invalid document has changed to a legally valid contract approved by means of a signature. In other words, the signature corresponds to the change that affects the direct object of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’.

In the indirect transitive construction, the indirect object is not viewed as affected, that is, signed. As argued in section 5.1.2, the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer signals a disruption in the transfer of energy between the subject and the object, which entails a loss of affectedness. With *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer, the indirect object is viewed as a reference point, in relation to which the expression of the subject’s approval is interpreted, and the indirect object is not necessarily viewed as being signed, hence the acceptability of the indirect construction with nominal phrases that are not compatible with the act of signing (see (23a)). In the indirect transitive construction, the act of signing is secondary or absent from the lexical meaning of the verb and salience is given to the notion of approval. The use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer consequently goes along with a metaphorical extension of the lexical meaning of the verb when used in the direct transitive construction, through which only the notion of approval becomes salient.

The case of argument alternations of *tenir* ‘to hold’ differs from the one of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’, in the sense that the indirect transitive construction cannot be directly traced back to the direct transitive construction, as illustrated in (24):

- (24)a. *Il tient bien l’ échelle.*
 he holds well the ladder
 ‘He is holding the ladder firmly.’
- b. *L’ échelle tient bien.*
 the ladder holds well
 ‘The ladder holds up.’
- c. *L’ échelle tient au mur.*
 the ladder holds at/to.the wall
 ‘The ladder is fixed to the wall.’

- d. *Christian tient à son échelle.*
 Christian holds at/to his ladder
 ‘Christian is (emotionally) attached to his ladder.’

The verb *tenir* ‘to hold’ exhibits a case of inchoative-causative alternation (see Haspelmath 1993, *inter alia*) in (24a) and (24b). The theme-object of the direct transitive verb (24a) can be used as the theme-subject of the verb used intransitively (24b). The causative construction in (24a) shows one of the senses of the polysemic verb *tenir* ‘to hold’, which can be roughly glossed as an agent acting on the theme to avoid that it falls, to ‘keep it in place’. In (24b), the inchoative construction entails that the theme-subject is not going to fall, is ‘kept in place’. As shown by (24c), the inchoative construction of the verb is compatible with prepositional phrases. In this example, the intransitive construction of the verb is localized in relation to the referent expressed by the preposition phrase introduced by *à* ‘at/to’, that is, the ladder is viewed as being ‘kept in place’ in relation to the wall. In other words, it is understood as being fixed to the wall. It can be postulated that the construction of the inchoative verb with prepositional phrases constitutes the conceptual basis of the metaphorical extension of the lexical meaning of the verb observed with the indirect transitive construction in (24d). While the construction in (24c) entails a concrete, physical attachment, the construction in (24d) entails an abstract emotional attachment.

In the indirect transitive constructions of the verb *tenir* ‘to hold’, the subject can be viewed as an experiencer who is emotionally attached to the referent expressed by the indirect object. In this construction, the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized in terms of abstract localization. There is, indeed, no concrete spatial localization entailed in this

construction. The construction in (24d) does not entail spatial proximity as it does in (24c). The indirect object can be viewed as the reference point in relation to which the emotional attachment of the experiencer-subject is interpreted. The use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer in this construction thus correlates with the metaphorical extension of the lexical meaning of the verb, from the expression of a physical attachment with *à* ‘at/to’ expressing general localization to the expression of an emotional attachment with *à* ‘at/to’ expressing abstract localization.

The examples with *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ and *tenir* ‘to hold’ show how the use of *à* ‘at/to’ can be related to metaphorical extensions of the meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction. Although a similar effect can be noted, to some extent, with the verbs studied in the following sections, the difference of meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is far from being as clear cut as the one observed with the verbs studied in this section.

5.4. APPLAUDIR ‘TO APPLAUD’

5.4.1. Semantic characterization

The verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ exhibits a case of direct/indirect argument alternation for which the meaning difference between the two constructions is, to some extent, comparable to the one observed with *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ (see section 5.3.2), but not as systematic, in the sense that, although the meaning of the indirect transitive construction of the verb can be argued to be more abstract, metaphorical than the direct one, the same can be said of some uses of the direct one, as shown in (25)–(29):

- (25) *Je préférerais, assis dans un coin de ce vaste*
 I would prefer sitting in a corner of this huge
auditoire, applaudir chacun des discours.
 auditorium to applaud each of the speeches
 ‘I would prefer, sitting in a corner of this huge auditorium, to applaud each of the speeches.’
 (Barrès, Maurice, *Mes cahiers, Tome 5 1906–1907, 1929–1957*: 297, Paris: Plon)
- (26) *(...) le journal de Brissot, dans son numéro du 25*
 the newspaper of Brissot in its issue of the 25
décembre, applaudissait au discours prononcé la
 December applauded at the speech pronounced the
veille par Barère sur l’ état de Paris et de la France.
 eve by Barère on the state of Paris and of the France
 ‘(...) Brissot’s newspaper, in the issue of December 25th, approved of the speech delivered on the eve by Barère on the state of Paris and of France.’
 (Jaurès, Jean, *Histoire socialiste: Tome 4. La Convention (1793–1794)*, 1901–1904: 112, Paris: Jules Rouff)
- (27) *Et il ne cessait pas d’ applaudir son imagination qui retrouvait*
 and he not stopped not of to applaud his imagination that rediscovered
tout à coup la maîtresse ancienne de ses rêves puérils et de
 suddenly the mistress ancient of his dreams puerile and of
ses insomnies fiévreuses.
 his insomnia feverish
 ‘And he kept applauding his imagination that was suddenly rediscovering the ancient mistress of his puerile dreams and his feverish sleepless nights.’
 (Adam, Paul, *L’enfant d’Austerlitz*, 1902: 480, Paris: Ollendorff)
- (28) *La vieille femme l’ applaudit des deux mains.*
 the old woman him.ACC applauds of the two hands
 ‘The old woman applauds him heartily/with two hands.’
 (Calamel, Dominique, *Face au destin*, 2010: 214, Paris: Publibook)

- (29) *Pour ma part j' y applaudis des deux mains.*
 for my part I there applaud of.the two hands
 'As far as I am concerned, I applauded/approved of it heartily/with two hands.'
 (Proust, Marcel, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, 1962: 460, Paris: Gallimard)

TLFi distinguishes two main senses for the verb *applaudir* 'to applaud', that is, in rough terms, 'clapping one's hands to show approbation' and 'approving of'. The first sense is described as being used with the direct transitive construction, whereas the second one can appear in the two transitive constructions, direct and indirect. The direct transitive construction of the verb in (25) can indeed be interpreted as the subject preferring to clap his hands to potentially show his approbation at the end of each speech. On the other hand, the indirect transitive construction of *applaudir* 'to applaud' in (26) does not necessarily entail the notion of 'clapping one's hands' in the given context and is mainly read as 'to approve of'. *TLFi* also notes that the sense of 'approving of' can be used with the direct transitive construction, as illustrated in (27), where the use of the direct transitive construction of *applaudir* 'to applaud' in the given context does not seem to entail the notion of 'clapping one's hands'. Troberg (2008: 56) argues that there is no show of applause with the indirect transitive construction, which seems too categorical with regards to (28) and (29). The possibility of using the phrase *des deux mains* 'with two hands' (i.e., 'heartily') with both the direct (28) and indirect (29) constructions raises the question of whether the notion of 'clapping one's hands' is totally excluded from the indirect transitive construction. Depending on the interpretation of the phrase as literal or

figurative, it seems that the indirect transitive construction could still be associated with the notion of ‘clapping one’s hands’ in some contexts.

The main difference between the meaning of the verb in the direct and indirect constructions is related to a matter of focus. While in the direct transitive construction, there can be a focus on either the notion of ‘clapping one’s hands’, as in (25), or the one of approbation (i.e., ‘approving of’), as in (27), with the indirect transitive construction, the focus can only be on the notion of approbation, as shown in (30):

- (30)a. *Ils ont applaudi la décision à contrecœur.*
 they have applauded the decision reluctantly
 ‘They reluctantly applauded the decision.’
- b. ?*Ils ont applaudi à la décision à contrecœur.*
 they have applauded at/to the decision reluctantly
 ‘?They approved of the decision reluctantly.’

In (30a), the phrase *à contrecœur* ‘reluctantly’ is compatible with the direct transitive construction and the only interpretation possible involves ‘clapping one’s hands’. In (30b), the phrase *à contrecœur* ‘reluctantly’ is not compatible with the indirect transitive construction. The focus is on the notion of approbation, not of ‘clapping one’s hands’, and the notion of approbation is semantically incongruous with *à contrecœur* ‘reluctantly’. The meaning of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ in the indirect transitive construction is more abstract than the one in the direct construction, in the sense that the notion of ‘approbation’ takes precedence over the more concrete notion of ‘clapping one’s hands’.

From a diachronic point of view, the verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ was exclusively followed by indirect objects until the end of the 17th century (Troberg 2008). The verb is no longer compatible with animate indirect objects, as shown in (31), except in very rare cases, as illustrated in (32):

(31) a. ?*Il applaudit à l’acteur.*
 he applauds at/to the actor
 ‘He applauds the actor.’

b. ?*Il lui applaudit.*
 he him.DAT applauds
 ‘He applauds him.’

c. ?*Il applaudit à lui.*
 he applauds at/to him
 ‘He applauds him.’

(32) *Même s’il a la vertu pour femme, on ne peut
 even if he has the virtue for wife one not can
 demander au mari d’applaudir au séducteur
 ask at/to.the husband of to applaud at/to.the seducer
 ‘Even though he has virtue for wife, one cannot ask the husband to applaud the
 seducer.’
 (Giraudoux, Jean, *Pour Lucrèce : pièce en trois actes*, 1953: 15, Paris: Grasset)*

As shown in (31), the verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ shows a low level of acceptability with animate indirect objects (31a), a dative pronoun (31b) and even a neutral indirect object pronoun (31c) (see section 3.1.2; Herslund 1988). The example in (32) is given as an example of the use of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ followed by an animate indirect object. *TLFi* defines the meaning of the construction in terms of ‘approving of someone’s act’

and characterize it as rare, which is actually attested by the low number of occurrences found in the *ARTFL* corpus.

5.4.2. Corpus analysis

As illustrated in Table 5.1, most occurrences of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ were found in a direct transitive (43.63% of all occurrences) or an intransitive construction (43.10% of all occurrences). If there are slightly more occurrences of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ followed by an inanimate indirect object (11.96%) than by an inanimate direct object (8.68%), the number of occurrences of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ followed by an animate direct object (34.69%) is far more superior than the one followed by an animate indirect object (0.39%). These findings corroborate the description of the indirect transitive construction with an animate nominal phrase as rare (*TLFi*; see section 5.4.1).

CONSTRUCTION TYPE	COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
TRANSITIVE	DIRECT	332	43.63%
	Animate NP	264	34.69%
	Inanimate NP	66	8.68%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	2	0.26%
	INDIRECT	101	13.27%
	Animate NP	3	0.39%
	Inanimate NP	91	11.96%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	7	0.92%
INTRANSITIVE		328	43.10%
TOTAL		761	100%

Table 5.1: Occurrences of *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ by construction type (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

One of the main differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions observed in the corpus concerns objects that refer to work of art (i.e., *œuvre* ‘work (of art)’, *pièce* ‘(theater) play’ and titles). Among the 66 inanimate direct objects, 19 refer to a work of art, and no occurrence of a referent to a work of art was found with the indirect transitive construction. This finding can actually be accounted for in relation to the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer, as shown in the following section.

5.4.3. Semantic analysis

As discussed in section 5.4.1, the lexical meaning of the verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ entails the notions of ‘clapping one’s hands’ and ‘approbation’. The lexical meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction can thereby be regarded as

entailing a semantic relationship between the Trajector and the Landmark, the subject's approving of the object and an emission of energy, 'clapping one's hands', from the Trajector. The affectedness of the object remains abstract and unspecified (see sections 2.2.2 and 5.1.2; Beavers 2010), as the object cannot truly be described as undergoing a change. Consequently, unlike what can be observed with the cases of argument alternations exhibited by *contredire* 'to contradict' (see section 5.5), *insulter* 'to insult' (see section 5.6) and *satisfaire* 'to satisfy' (see section 5.7), the notion of affectedness is not central in the characterization of the semantic differences observed between the direct and indirect constructions of *applaudir* 'to applaud'.

The main semantic difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions appears to result from the use of *à* 'at/to' as an abstract localizer. First, the use of *à* 'at/to' signals a disruption in the transfer of energy, which goes along with a loss of the prominence of the energy that the lexical meaning of the verb entails, that is, 'clapping one's hands'. As shown in section 5.4.1, the notion of 'clapping one's hands' tends to be secondary with the indirect transitive construction, or completely absent in some occurrences. Then, *à* 'at/to', as an abstract localizer, leads to an interpretation of the Landmark in abstract terms. Consider the following examples:

- (33)a. *Il applaudit le séducteur.*
 he applauds the seducer
 'He applauds the seducer.'
- b. *Il applaudit au séducteur.*
 he applauds at/to.the seducer
 'He applauds/approves of the seducer's act.'

In (33a), the direct object can be interpreted as referring to an individuated human being predefined in the context. In (33b), this interpretation is not possible. The indirect transitive construction in (33b) is indeed interpreted, following the sense defined by *TLFi* for this type of construction (see section 5.4.1), as the subject's approving of the act of seducing associated with the object. The indirect object is therefore only interpreted in an abstract way, through an abstract dimension associated with the referent (i.e., the act of seducing), and cannot truly be viewed as a concrete individuated human being. This characterization of the role of *à* 'at/to' can also be observed with inanimate referents:

- (34)a. *Il applaudit cette entreprise.*
 he applauds this company/undertaking
 'He applauds this company/this undertaking.'
- b. *Il applaudit à cette entreprise.*
 he applauds at/to this company/undertaking
 'He applauds/approves of this undertaking.'

The word *entreprise* can either refer to a company or an undertaking. If, in (34a), the direct object can be interpreted as either, in (34b), the indirect object can only be interpreted as an undertaking. The interpretation of the indirect object as the more concrete referent, that is, a company, is blocked in virtue of the role played by *à* 'at/to' as an abstract localizer.

The use of *à* 'at/to' as an abstract localizer leads to a characterization of the Landmark as a reference point, which implies that there should be a dimension associated with the object in relation to which the notion of approval can be interpreted. Consider the following examples :

- (35)a. *Il a applaudi le discours du maire.*
 he has applauded the speech of.the mayor
 ‘He applauded the mayor’s speech.’
- b. *Au discours du maire, il a applaudi.*
 at/to.the speech of.the mayor he has applauded
 ‘At the mayor’s speech, he applauded.’
- c. *Au discours du maire, il y a applaudi.*
 at/to.the speech of.the mayor he there has applauded
 ‘The mayor’s speech, he applauded/approved of it.’

The word *discours* ‘speech’ can refer to the content of the speech or to the event of the speech. In (35a), the two interpretations are possible. In (35b), the verb is used intransitively and the prepositional phrase is regarded as an adverbial, due to the absence of a resumptive pronoun (see section 3.1.2), and the term *discours* ‘speech’ can only be viewed as the event where the subject applauded. In (35c), the verb is used transitively and the prepositional phrase can be regarded, due to the use of the pronoun *y* ‘there’ (see section 3.1.2), as an argument of the verb. As an indirect argument of the verb, the phrase *au discours* ‘(at/to) the speech’ can only be read as referring to the content of the speech, which can be viewed as more abstract than the event, as a metonymy of the event. This abstract dimension associated with the speech, that is, the content of the speech, can thus be used as a reference point in relation to which the subject’s approval is interpreted and is compatible with the semantics of the indirect transitive construction. The low acceptability of the indirect transitive construction with concrete individuated items can be accounted for by this analysis.

The subtle meaning difference between the direct and indirect constructions of the verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ results from the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer in the sense that the indirect transitive construction is only compatible with objects entailing an abstract dimension that is used as a reference point.

5.5. *CONTREDIRE* ‘TO CONTRADICT’

5.5.1. Semantic characterization

The verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’, similarly to *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ and *insulter* ‘to insult’ was compatible with dative (animate) indirect objects until the 17th century (see Troberg 2008). In modern French, the verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’ is no longer compatible with animate indirect objects, as illustrated in (36):

- (36) a. *Il contredit le professeur.*
 he contradicts the professor
 ‘He contradicts the professor.’
- b. *?Il contredit au professeur.*
 he contradicts at/to.the professor
 ‘He contradicts the professor.’
- c. *Il le contredit.*
 he him.ACC contradicts
 ‘He contradicts him.’
- d. *?Il lui contredit.*
 he him.DAT contradicts
 ‘He contradicts him.’

Troberg (2008) insinuates that the valency change observed with *contredire* ‘to contradict’ is not restricted to animate indirect objects but concerns all indirect objects,

animate and inanimate, as she argues that native speakers only accept the direct transitive construction of the verb (2008: 65). The indirect transitive construction, however, despite its relative marginality (see section 5.5.2), is not only acceptable to the native speakers I have consulted, but is also attested in modern French corpora, as shown in (37) and (38):

- (37) *Les savants eux-mêmes ne contredisent pas tous à cette*
the scholars themselves not contradict not all at/to this
opinion.
opinion
‘The scholars themselves do not all contradict this opinion.’
(Breton, André, *Les Manifestes du Surréalisme*, 1947: 211, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire)
- (38) *On fait volontiers reproche à l’ hétérogénie de*
one makes readily reproach at/to the heterogeneity of
contredire à l’ orthodoxie religieuse.
to contradict at/to the orthodoxy religious
‘One readily blames the heterogeneity for contradicting the religious orthodoxy.’
(Rostand, Jean, *La Genèse de la vie*, 1951: 94, Paris: Hachette)

The verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’ thus exhibits cases of argument alternations, as illustrated in (39) and (40):

- (39) *(...) la donation contredit le principe d’ après lequel la*
the donation contradicts the principle of after which the
propriété résulte du travail.
ownership results of.the work
‘(...) donation contradicts the principle according to which ownership results from work.’
(Durkheim, Émile, *Leçons de sociologie : physique des mœurs et du droit*, 1900: 37, Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France)

- (40) *Comte contredit au principe du progrès que le xviii^e siècle avait posé par la Loi des trois États.*
 Comte contradicts at/to.the principle of.the progress that the 18th century had posited by the Law of.the three states
 ‘Comte contradicts the principle of progress that the 18th century had posited with the Law of the Three States.’
 (Brunschvicg, Léon, *Les Âges de l'intelligence*, 1934, 2009: 8, Chicago: ARTFL Electronic Edition)

The semantic difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is very subtle, as shown by (41):

- (41) a. *Cet argument contredit le principe.*
 this argument contradicts the principle
 ‘This argument contradicts the principle.’
 b. *Cet argument contredit au principe.*
 this argument contradicts at/to.the principle
 ‘This argument contradicts the principle.’
 c. *Ce résultat contredit le principe.*
 this result contradicts the principle
 ‘This result contradicts the principle.’
 d. *?Ce résultat contredit au principe.*
 this result contradicts at/to.the principle
 ‘This result contradicts the principle.’

With the direct transitive construction of *contradire* ‘to contradict’ in (41a), the interpretation can be one in which the argument states the opposite of the principle, and thereby, invalidates it. With the indirect transitive construction in (41b), the reading obtained is that the rationale of the argument does not follow the rationale defined by the principle. While in (41a), the contradiction affects the nature of the principle, that is, it

renders it invalid, it does not in (41b), in which the contradiction is interpreted in relation to the principle. In other words, in (41a), the contradiction is interpreted as a contradiction *to* the principle and not as a contradiction *of* the principle. The preposition *à* ‘at/to’ in (41b) expresses an abstract localization, in the sense that its complement, *le principe* ‘the principle’ is perceived as a reference point, in relation to which the argument is interpreted as contradictory. The example in (41c), with the direct transitive construction, entails that the result contradicts, invalidates the principle. As a result comprises no rationale in itself, it cannot be compared to the rationale of the principle and, consequently, the principle cannot be viewed, in this case, as a reference point, hence the low acceptability of (41d).

The use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer appears to play an essential role in the subtle semantic difference between the direct transitive construction and the indirect one, which is much less frequent than the direct one, as shown by the number of occurrences found in the *ARTFL* corpus.

5.5.2. Corpus analysis

As illustrated in Table 5.2, most occurrences of the verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’ found in the *ARTFL* corpus (20th century) are followed by a direct object (84.39% of all the occurrences of the verb). The use of the indirect transitive construction is thus much less frequent (6.40% of all occurrences) than the use of the direct one. Furthermore, the indirect transitive construction occurs more frequently with the inanimate indirect object

y ‘there’ (35/55 indirect NPs) than with a full inanimate NP (12/55 indirect NPs). Note that no occurrence of animate NP was found with the indirect transitive construction.

CONSTRUCTION TYPE	COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
TRANSITIVE	DIRECT	719	84.39%
	Animate NP	337	39.56%
	Inanimate NP	369	43.31%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	13	1.52%
	INDIRECT	55	6.40%
	Animate NP	0	0%
	Inanimate NP (Pronoun <i>y</i>)	53 (35)	6.17% (4.07%)
	Finite-tensed Clauses	2	0.23%
INTRANSITIVE		78	9.08%
TOTAL		852	100%

Table 5.2: Occurrences of *contredire* ‘to contradict’ by construction type (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

The fact that the indirect transitive construction of the verb occurs more frequently with the pronoun *y* ‘there’ than with full nominal phrases can be accounted for in relation to the specific use of *y* ‘there’ with *contredire* ‘to contradict’ as a discursive pronoun, resulting from the meaning of the indirect transitive construction, as discussed in the following section (section 5.5.3).

5.5.3. Semantic analysis

The function of the pronoun *y* ‘there’, when used with *contredire* ‘to contradict’, is not only restricted to the replacement of an indirect object. In some cases, it can indeed be characterized as a discursive pronoun, that is, a pro-form referring to a part of the discourse, as illustrated in (42):

- (44) *Ainsi, quand les théologiens veulent mettre d' accord les*
thus when the theologians want to put of agreement the
textes de la bible avec la réalité scientifiquement constatée,
texts of the Bible with the reality scientifically established
ils disent que dans la genèse, le mot jour désigne une
they say that in the genesis the word day designates a
période géologique de plusieurs millions d' années. Je n' y
period geological of several millions of years I not there
contredis point.
contradict not
‘Thus, when theologians want to reconcile the texts from the Bible with the scientifically established reality, they say that in the Book of Genesis, the word *day* refers to a geological period of several millions of years. I do not contradict that.’
(Jaurès, Jean, *Études socialistes*, 1902: XXXV, Paris: Ollendorff)

In (42), the pronoun *y* ‘there’ used in the second sentence refers to the whole first sentence. The only pronoun that could be used to keep the second sentence acceptable would be the direct pronoun *les* ‘them’, referring, in that case, only to the theologians. The fact that the indirect pronoun can refer to a whole sentence while the direct pronoun cannot supports the description of the indirect objects of *contredire* ‘to contradict’ as reference points. The indirect pronoun *y* ‘there’ when used with *contredire* ‘to contradict’ can refer to a more abstract and general domain than the direct pronouns. With the

indirect construction, not only nominal phrases, but also parts of the discourse are viewed as reference points in relation to which the meaning of the verb is interpreted.

The main meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions appears to be related to the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer, that is, *à* ‘at/to’ introduces a reference point, as shown in (43):

- (43)a. *Une étude contredit le principe d'abstinence*
a study contradicts the principle of abstinence
absolue d'alcool pendant la grossesse. Les femmes enceintes
absolute of alcohol during the pregnancy the women pregnant
peuvent boire de l'alcool.
can to drink some alcohol
‘A study contradicts the principle of absolute abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy. Pregnant women can drink alcohol.’
- b. *Une étude contredit au principe d'abstinence*
a study contradicts at/to.the principle of abstinence
absolue d'alcool pendant la grossesse. ?Les femmes enceintes
absolute of alcohol during the pregnancy the women pregnant
peuvent boire de l'alcool.
can to drink some alcohol
‘A study does not respect the principle of absolute abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy. ?Pregnant women can drink alcohol.’

In (43a), the direct construction entails that the study invalidates the absolute principle of abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy. It can therefore be inferred that pregnant women can drink during pregnancy. In this context, the second sentence in (43a) is pragmatically acceptable. In (43b), the indirect construction implies that the study does not respect the principle of abstinence from alcohol (i.e., pregnant women drank during the study). The principle is viewed as a reference point in relation to which the study presents a contradiction, the one of pregnant women drinking. The study, therefore, does

not invalidate the principle, as is the case with the direct construction. Based on the inference of the first sentence in (43b), the second sentence is pragmatically odd.

The contrast between (43a) and (43b) can be accounted for in terms of a difference in affectedness. The oblique argument entails a lower degree of affectedness than the direct one (44):

- (44)a. *Ce qui est arrivé au principe c' est que la loi l' a contredit.*
 it that is happened at/to.the principle it is that the law it has contradicted
 'What happened to the principle is that the law contradicted it.'
- b. ?*Ce qui est arrivé au principe c' est que la loi y a contredit*
 it that is happened at/to.the principle it is that the law there has contradicted
 'What happened to the principle is that the law contradicted it.'

Using the test *What happened to X is Y* suggested by Cruse (1973) and following the Morphosyntactic Alignment Principle (Beavers 2010: 848) (see section 2.2.2), the object of the direct transitive construction in (43a) entails potential change, while the object of the indirect transitive construction in (43b) entails unspecified change. In other words, the direct transitive construction entails a change of the object (i.e., the subject invalidating the rationale of the object) and the indirect transitive construction does not (i.e., the subject not respecting the rationale of the object).

The use of *à* 'at/to' as an abstract localizer thus appears not only to characterize the indirect object as a reference point, but also to encode a disruption in the transfer of energy associated with the lexical meaning of *contredire* 'to contradict', which yields to a lower degree of affectedness of the indirect object.

5.6. *INSULTER* ‘TO INSULT’

5.6.1. Semantic characterization

The verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ presents a case of direct/indirect argument alternation for which the semantic differences between the two constructions are also very subtle, as illustrated in (45)–(48):

- (45) *Des hommes injurieux le poussèrent dans la rue,*
some men insulting him.ACC pushed in the street
se tinrent sur la porte pour insulter sa marchandise.
themselves held on the door for to insult his merchandise
‘Some insulting men pushed him into the street, stood in the doorway to insult his merchandise.’
(Hamp, Pierre, *Marée fraîche; Vin de Champagne*, 1936: 161, Paris: Gallimard)

- (46) *Il faut que des criminels se permettent d’insulter*
it must that some criminals themselves allow of to insult
aux lois
at/to.the laws
‘Some criminals must allow themselves to disrespect the laws.’
(Duhamel, Georges, *Cécile parmi nous*, in *Chronique des Pasquier*, Vol. 7, 1948–1949: 85, Paris: Mercure de France)

- (47) *Il insulte notre dignité.*
he insults our dignity
‘He insults our dignity.’
(Camus, Albert, *Caligula*, 1962: 31, Paris: Gallimard)

- (48) (...) *pourvu qu’ on n’ insulte point à sa dignité* (...)
provided that one not insult not at/to his dignity
‘(...) as long as one does not insult his dignity (...)’
(Ambrière, Francis, *Les Grandes Vacances*, 1946: 129, Paris: Éditions de la nouvelle France)

As shown in (45)–(48), the use of the verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ can appear in direct transitive constructions ((45) and (47)) and indirect transitive constructions ((46) and (48)), sometimes with the same noun, such as *dignité* ‘dignity’ in ((49) and (50)). *TLFi* attributes a different meaning to each of the constructions. While the meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction is equivalent to the meaning of ‘insulting/swearing at’, the meaning of the verb in the indirect transitive construction can be read, roughly, as “not respecting what is usually respected”. In (45), the meaning of the verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ in the direct transitive construction can contextually be interpreted as the subject shouting abuse at the merchandise and the meaning of “respecting what is usually respected” would be incongruous in this context. In (46), the meaning of the verb in the indirect transitive construction implies that the criminals do not respect the laws.

From a diachronic viewpoint, the verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ was compatible with dative indirect objects until the 17th century (Troberg 2008). In modern French, it is no longer compatible with dative indirect objects (49), even though it can be compatible with animate indirect objects (50):

- (49) ?*Il lui insulte.*
 he him.DAT insults
 ‘He insults him.’

- (50) *en insultant aux assassins*
 in insulting at/to.the murderers
 ‘by insulting the murderers’
 (Adam, Paul, *L'enfant d'Austerlitz*, 1902: 78, Paris: Ollendorff)

The use of animate indirect objects with *insulter* ‘to insult’, as illustrated in (52), is stylistically marked and occurs rarely (see section 5.6.2). Grammarians actually tend to

describe the use of the indirect transitive construction of *insulter* ‘to insult’ as generally marked, as pertaining to the literary register (Colin 1971; Girodet 1981). This characterization is supported by the low frequency of occurrences of the indirect transitive construction found in the corpus.

5.6.2. Corpus analysis

As Table 5.3 shows, most occurrences of *insulter* ‘to insult’ found in the corpus are followed by a direct object (85.82% of all occurrences). The number of occurrences of *insulter* ‘to insult’ used in the indirect transitive construction is relatively low and can be described as being marked, in comparison to the use of the direct transitive construction. The use of indirect transitive constructions is even more marked when followed by animate objects (0.73% of all occurrences), in comparison to the use of direct transitive constructions with animate objects (73.64%).

CONSTRUCTION TYPE	COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
TRANSITIVE	DIRECT	472	85.82%
	Animate NP	405	73.64%
	Inanimate NP	64	11.64%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	3	0.54%
	INDIRECT	39	7.09%
	Animate NP	4	0.73%
	Inanimate NP	35	6.36%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	0	0%
INTRANSITIVE		39	7.09%
TOTAL		550	100%

Table 5.3: Occurrences of *insulter* ‘to insult’ by construction type (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

It should also be noted that, as much as the use of the indirect transitive construction is marked with animate objects, it shows a low level of compatibility with indirect objects having a concrete referent. No inanimate indirect object with a concrete referent was found, while, among the 64 inanimate direct objects following *insulter* ‘to insult’, 10 had a concrete referent. Furthermore, the use of the indirect transitive construction seems to be preferred when the object refers to some type of misfortune. In the corpus, 5 occurrences of indirect objects referring to misfortune were found (i.e., *infortune* ‘misfortune’, *malheur* ‘unhappiness’, *souffrance* ‘suffering’, *misère* ‘misery’), while no direct object referring to misfortune was found. These findings can actually be

accounted for in relation to the meaning of the indirect transitive construction, as discussed in the following section (section 5.6.3).

5.6.3. Semantic analysis

The lexical meaning of the verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ can be viewed as entailing the notion of disrespect. The meaning of the verb in the direct transitive construction implies that the subject disrespects, degrades the integrity of the referent of the object through a behavior, a word of abuse, etc. In the indirect transitive construction, the meaning of the verb is only interpreted as the subject showing disrespect in relation to the object. Consider the data in (51) and (52):

- (51) *Je t’ interdis d’ insulter la mémoire de mon fils!*
I you.ACC forbid of to insult the memory of my son
‘I forbid you to insult the memory of my son!’
(Druon, Maurice, *Les Grandes Familles*, 1952: 201, Monaco: Imprimerie Nationale)
- (52) *Il se révolta contre une liberté d’ expression qui insultait
à la mémoire de la victime.*
he himself revolted against a liberty of expression that insulted
at/to the memory of the victim
‘He rebelled against a freedom of speech that insulted the memory of the victim.’
(Aymé, Marcel, *La Jument verte*, 1935: 62, Paris: Gallimard)

In (51), the use of the direct transitive construction entails that the speaker forbids the co-speaker to debase the integrity, the honor associated with the memory of her son. The direct transitive construction entails a transfer of energy that can be interpreted in terms of debasing the integrity of the object. The object can thus be viewed as being directly

affected by the behavior of the subject. In (52), the use of the indirect transitive construction entails that the behavior associated with the freedom of speech is not appropriate in relation to the respect due to the memory of the victim. It does not necessarily entail that the behavior directly affects the integrity of the victim's memory.

The subtle meaning difference between the two constructions can be accounted for in relation to the profiling of each construction. On the one hand, the direct transitive construction entails the affectedness of the direct object, which can be viewed as the debasement of the integrity of the object. On the other hand, the indirect transitive construction entails that the subject demonstrates some kind of disrespect in relation to a reference point, the indirect object. The meaning of the indirect transitive construction thus appears to result from the use of *à* 'at/to' as an abstract localizer. The indirect object is viewed as a reference point, which entails that some kind of respect is due to it, as illustrated in (53) and (54):

- (53) a. (...) *vous insultez aujourd'hui par votre luxe à la misère*
 you insult today by your luxury at/to the misery
 publique (...) public
 'with your luxury, nowadays, you disrespect public misery'
 (Jaurès, Jean, *Histoire socialiste : Tome 4. La Convention (1793–1794)*,
 1901–1904: 1038, Paris: Jules Rouff)
- b. ?*Vous insultez à la marchandise.*
 you insult at/to the merchandise
 'You insult/disrespect the merchandise.'

- (54) a. (...) *et insulter aux patriotes en leur refusant l' air*
 and to insult at/to.the patriots in them refusing the anthem
 national (...) *national*
 ‘(...) and disrespecting the patriots by refusing to play the national anthem to them’
 (Aulard, Alphonse, *Histoire politique de la Révolution française* (1789–1804), 1901: 299, Paris: Armand Colin)
- b. ?*Vous insultez à Emma.*
 you insult at/to Emma
 ‘You insult/disrespect Emma.’

As noted in section 5.6.2, the use of the indirect transitive construction appears to be preferred when the object implies some kind of misfortune, such as *misère* ‘misery’, as in (55a). Referents implying misfortune can be described as entailing some sort of respect. It is certainly part of common cultural values to show respect to unfortunate people. As it is used as a reference point, the indirect object needs to entail the notion of respect, in relation to which the subject’s behavior is evaluated as being inappropriate. In (55a), the subject’s luxury is regarded as being inappropriate in relation to the respect that should be due to less privileged people. The use of the indirect transitive construction is not compatible with concrete referents, such as *la merchandise* ‘merchandise’ in (55b), as they are not systematically associated with the notion of respect and, thereby, cannot be used as a reference point. Similarly, in (56a), refusing to play the national anthem is seen as inappropriate in relation to the respect entailed by the referent of *patriotes* ‘patriots’. It can indeed be argued that patriots are culturally associated with some kind of respect. In

(56b), without a context, the referent to *Emma* is not associated with any kind of respect, hence the low acceptability of the indirect transitive construction.

The main difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of *insulter* ‘to insult’ are thus related to the entailment of the notion of respect. With the indirect transitive construction, the object needs to entail the notion of respect. With the direct transitive construction, the notion of respect is only entailed by the lexical meaning of the verb and the object can be characterized as being disrespected, through the debasement of the object’s integrity. In (56a), for instance, the indirect transitive construction does not entail the affectedness of the object, that is, that the integrity of the patriots has been debased; it only means that the behavior of the subject is viewed as inappropriate in relation to the respect that is due to them. This can also account for why the indirect transitive construction is preferred to the direct one with objects referring to misfortune. Given that the direct transitive construction entails affectedness and, consequently, that the integrity of the object is debased, it seems a bit incongruous to use a construction entailing ‘the debasement of misfortune’. It should be noted, however, that the direct transitive structure *insulter la misère* ‘to insult misery’ is acceptable and that the use of either of the constructions can be simply viewed as a matter of stylistic choice. The direct transitive structure *insulter la misère* ‘to insult misery’ can, indeed, be interpreted as the debasement of misery, which culturally implies inherent respect.

The semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer in the direct/indirect transitive alternations of *insulter* ‘to insult’ can thus be compared with the one of *contredire* ‘to contradict’. With both verbs, the indirect object can be viewed as a

reference point in relation to which the lexical meaning of the verb is interpreted, and the indirect transitive construction entails less affectedness than the direct one.

5.7. SATISFAIRE ‘TO SATISFY’

5.7.1. Semantic characterization

Similarly to *applaudir* ‘to applaud’, *contredire* ‘to contradict’ and *insulter* ‘to insult’, the verb *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ exhibits a case of argument alternation for which the difference in meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is also very subtle, as illustrated in (55) and (56):

- (55) *Est-ce à ce moment-là qu' elle satisfait les exigences de*
 is it at/to that moment there that it satisfies the demands of
notre conscience morale?
 our consciousness moral
 ‘Is it at that moment that it satisfies the demands of our conscience?’
 (Bouglé, Célestin, *De la sociologie à l'action sociale. Pacifisme - féminisme - coopération*, 1931: 40, Paris: Alcan)
- (56) *Un grand écrivain satisfait à plus d' une exigence (...)*
 a great writer satisfies at/to more of one demand
 ‘A great writer satisfies more than one demand (...)’
 (Gide, André, *Journal, 1889–1939*, 1960: 287, Paris: Gallimard)
- (57) (...) *elle satisfait un besoin de précision qui est en nous (...)*
 it satisfies a need of precision that is in us
 ‘(...) it satisfies a need of precision that is in us (...)’
 (Hazard, Paul, *La Pensée européenne au XVIII^e siècle*, 1946: 71, Paris: Fayard)

- (58) (...) *il satisfait à un des besoins de sa nature* (...)
 it satisfies at/to one of the needs of his nature
 ‘(...) it satisfies one of the needs of his nature (...)’
 (Rolland, Romain, *Beethoven : les grandes époques créatrices*, 1937: 163, Paris: Éditions du Sablier)

The data given in (55)–(58) demonstrate that *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ can be used with either a direct transitive construction, such as in (55) and (57), or an indirect one, such as in (56) and (58), and sometimes, with the same noun, such as *exigence(s)* ‘demand(s)’ in (55) and (56) or *besoin(s)* ‘need(s)’ in (57) and (58). *TLFi* does not suggest a clear distinction of meaning between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb. Some grammarians (Colin 1971; Girodet 1981) note, however, that the indirect transitive construction is preferred when the object expresses an obligation.

The perception of the object as a duty, a source of requirement actually appears to be the most significant semantic difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions, as shown in (59) and (60):

- (59) *Il est traité par ses parents avec le plus grand respect, et on satisfait à ses moindres désirs.*
 he is treated by his parents with the most great respect and
 one satisfies at/to his least desires
 ‘He is treated by his parents with utmost respect and they satisfy his every desire.’
 (Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *L'Âme primitive*, 1927: 189, Paris: Presses universitaires de France)

- (60) *Une réincarnation périodique satisfait leur désir de revenir*
 a reincarnation periodical satisfies their desire of to return
sur cette terre
 on this earth
 ‘A periodical reincarnation satisfies their desire of returning on this earth.’
 (Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *L'Âme primitive*, 1927: 184, Paris: Presses universitaires de France)

In (59), the indirect object *ses moindres désirs* ‘his every desire’ can contextually be interpreted as a source of duty, of obligation, in the sense that fulfilling the desires of the child can be viewed as a duty. The use of the direct transitive construction in (60) does not give rise to the same reading. In (60), the desire is indeed not contextually viewed as a source of obligation. The interpretation of the indirect object as a source of requirement is actually supported by the fact that the indirect transitive construction occurs more frequently than the direct one with objects expressing an obligation.

5.7.2. Corpus analysis

As shown in Table 5.4, the use of the direct transitive construction of the verb *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ (80.09% of all occurrences) is more frequent than the use of the indirect one (17.69% of all occurrences). It should also be noted that the use of the indirect transitive construction with animate referents is relatively marginal (only 0.47% of all occurrences).

CONSTRUCTION TYPE	COMPLEMENTATION TYPE	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
TRANSITIVE	DIRECT	507	80.09%
	Animate NP	250	39.49%
	Inanimate NP	255	40.28%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	2	0.32%
	INDIRECT	112	17.69%
	Animate NP	3	0.47%
	Inanimate NP	106	16.75%
	Finite-tensed Clauses	3	0.47%
INTRANSITIVE		14	2.22%
TOTAL		633	100%

Table 5.4: Occurrences of *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ by construction type (*ARTFL* corpus/20th century)

Considering the most frequent nominal phrases used as direct or indirect objects of *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’, it turns out that the use of the direct transitive construction is more frequent with the most frequent nominal phrases than the use of the indirect one. This is, however, not the case for nominal phrases that express an obligation or that can be perceived as a source of obligation. As shown in Table 5.5, which provides the type of constructions in which some of the most frequent direct and/or indirect objects of the verb appear, the nominal phrases entailing a requirement (i.e., *devoir* ‘duty’, *exigence* ‘demand’, *obligation* ‘obligation’) or a source of requirement (i.e., *condition* ‘condition’) occur more frequently with the indirect transitive construction. This property actually results from the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer.

NOUN	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF THE NOUN USED AS A DIRECT OBJECT	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF THE NOUN USED AS AN INDIRECT OBJECT
<i>appétit</i> ‘appetite’	7 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>besoin</i> ‘need’	44 (80%)	11 (20%)
<i>curiosité</i> ‘curiosity’	6 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>désirs</i> ‘desires’	23 (85.19%)	4 (14.81%)
<i>esprit</i> ‘mind/spirit’	11 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>goût</i> ‘taste’	15 (93.75%)	1 (6.25%)
<i>instinct</i> ‘instinct’	8 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>raison</i> ‘reason’	7 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>condition</i> ‘condition’	0 (0%)	29 (100%)
<i>devoir</i> ‘duty’	0 (0%)	6 (100%)
<i>exigence</i> ‘demand’	5 (35.71%)	9 (64.29%)
<i>obligation</i> ‘obligation’	0 (0%)	2 (100%)

Table 5.5: Occurrences of some nouns as direct or indirect objects of *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ (ARTFL corpus/20th century)

5.7.3. Semantic analysis

The characterization of the indirect object as a general source of requirement appears to result from the meaning of the indirect construction and *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer. The indirect object is viewed as a reference point in relation to which the lexical meaning of the verb is interpreted. The lexical meaning of the verb *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ entails the notion of ‘no lack’, in the sense that the verb expresses the fulfillment of an abstract lack. In *satisfaire son désir* ‘to satisfy one’s desire’, for instance, the object implies an abstract lack (i.e., the lack of what constitutes the object of the desire) that the subject fills in (i.e., the subject “fulfills” the desire).

The meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions leads to a difference in how the notion of ‘no lack’ implied by the lexical semantics of the verb is interpreted. With the direct transitive construction, the subject can be seen as an active participant that fills in the lack entailed by the object, which means that the notion of ‘no lack’ is centered on the object. Conversely, with the indirect construction, the notion of ‘no lack’ is centered on the subject. In other words, the subject does not show any lack in relation to the referent expressed by the indirect object. Consider the data given in (63) and (64):

- (63) a. *Il satisfait leurs attentes.*
 he satisfies their expectations
 ‘He satisfies their expectations.
- b. *Il satisfait à leurs attentes.*
 he satisfies at/to their expectations
 ‘He meets their expectations.
- (64) a. *La révélation de ce secret satisfait ma curiosité.*
 the revelation of this secret satisfies my curiosity
 ‘The revelation of this secret satisfies my curiosity.
- b. *?La révélation de ce secret satisfait à ma curiosité.*
 the revelation of this secret satisfies at/to my curiosity
 ‘?The revelation of this secret meets my curiosity.’

In (63a), the direct transitive construction implies that the subject fills in the “lack” entailed by the direct object. The meaning of the verb in this construction is better translated in English with ‘to satisfy’. In (63b), the indirect transitive construction entails that the subject does not present any “lack” in relation to the expectations, and the meaning of the verb in this construction is closer to the meaning of ‘to meet’ in English.

The meaning difference between the two constructions is very subtle, given that, in the end, ‘satisfying expectations’ can easily entail ‘meeting expectations’ and ‘meeting expectations’ can easily entail ‘satisfying expectations’. In some contexts, though, the use of one construction appears to be more acceptable than the use of the other. In (64a), the object *ma curiosité* ‘my curiosity’ implies a “lack” (i.e., lack of knowledge) that the subject fills in. In (64b), the use of the indirect construction entails that *ma curiosité* ‘my curiosity’ is viewed as a set of criteria or conditions in relation to which the subject does not present any lack, which is semantically incongruous.

With the indirect transitive construction, the notion of lack is thus centered on the subject and the indirect object constitutes the reference point in relation to which the notion of lack is interpreted, that is, a set of criteria and/or conditions that the subject is supposed to meet. This general characterization of the Landmark of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer when used with *satisfaire* ‘to satisfy’ leads to view the Landmark as a general source of requirement for which the Trajector does not present any “lack” and can account for why the indirect transitive construction is preferred with objects entailing the notion of requirement.

5.8. SUMMARY

In section 5.1, I first defined abstract localization as the profiling of a Trajector in relation to an abstract Landmark, a reference point. In order to account for the differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions in terms of affectedness, I posited a correlation between the level of energy involved in an event and the level of affectedness of the object. I also claimed that the concepts of energy and affectedness

need to be specified in relation to the lexical meaning of each verb. I finally showed that the use of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive construction signals a disruption of energy which leads to a lower degree of affectedness of the indirect object as compared to the direct object.

In section 5.2, I studied cases of verb alternations in which localization in general is involved and demonstrated that the main semantic difference between the intransitive and transitive direct constructions of the verb *réussir* ‘to succeed’ and between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb *habiter* ‘to live/to inhabit’ is based on the fact that the direct transitive construction entails the affectedness of the direct object.

In section 5.3, I focused on cases of argument alternations for which a change of lexical meaning can be observed. For the case of *assister* ‘to assist/to attend’, I demonstrated that the lexical specification of the two senses of the verb is related to the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an event localizer, and for the cases of *souscrire* ‘to subscribe’ and *tenir* ‘to hold’, that the metaphorization of the lexical meaning of the verbs correlates with the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer.

In section 5.4, I analyzed the subtle meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb *applaudir* ‘to applaud’ and I demonstrated that they are essentially based on the abstract characterization of the Landmark profiled by *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer.

In section 5.5, I showed that the meaning difference between the two constructions of the verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’ is mainly based on the notion of affectedness. While the direct transitive construction entails that the subject invalidates the rationale associated with the direct object, the indirect transitive construction entails that the subject is in contradiction with the indirect object.

In section 5.6, I demonstrated that the meaning difference between the two constructions of the verb *insulter* ‘to insult’ is also related to the notion of affectedness. The direct transitive construction entails affectedness, that is, for this verb, the debasement of the integrity of the direct object, which is not the case for the indirect transitive construction, in which the indirect object is merely viewed as a reference point and is not affected.

In section 5.7, I pointed out that the notion of ‘no lack’ expressed by the lexical semantics of the verb is centered on the object with the direct transitive construction and on the subject with the indirect one. With the direct transitive construction, the object is affected, which entails that the lack is filled in. With the indirect transitive construction, the subject is viewed as not showing any lack in relation to the indirect object, marked as a reference point by the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as an abstract localizer.

Chapter 6: The Polysemy of *à* ‘at/to’ in the Argument Alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’

In this chapter, I examine the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’. In contrast to the verbs studied in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ is highly polysemous and the polysemy of *toucher* ‘to touch’ correlates with the polysemy of *à* ‘at/to’, in the sense that the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations is not uniform but varies in relation to the different senses of the verb.

In section 6.1, I characterize the various senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ and highlight some of the most significant meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions. In section 6.2, I review some of the major studies on the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ and its argument alternations and show the limits of the previous analyses on the topic. In section 6.3, I provide an analysis that accounts for both the polysemy of *toucher* ‘to touch’ and the polysemy of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive constructions of the verb. In section 6.4, I summarize my findings.

6.1. SEMANTIC CHARACTERIZATION

In this section, I offer a semantic characterization of the polysemy of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ (section 6.1.1) and provide a description of the main meaning differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb (section 6.1.2).

6.1.1. Polysemy of *toucher* ‘to touch’

As discussed in section 2.3.2, polysemy is a dynamic concept that can be represented through a continuum between homonymy and the vague. Although the semantic differences between some of the senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ could be viewed as

vague, I assume that the various senses of the verb are distinct enough to characterize *toucher* ‘to touch’ as polysemous. Furthermore, *toucher* ‘to touch’ can exhibit some zeugmatic effects, as illustrated in (1), which supports a characterization of the verb as polysemous (see Cruse 1995, *inter alia*):

- (1) ?Christian a touché sa bourse et son livre.
 Christian has touched his scholarship and his book
 ‘?Christian has received/touched his scholarship and his book.’

The sentence given in (1) illustrates a zeugmatic effect between the senses ‘to receive’, as in *toucher sa bourse* ‘to receive his scholarship’, and of ‘to touch’, as in *toucher son livre* ‘to touch his book’.

The various senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ have a common origin, the notion of contact, which is characteristic of polysemous words (see section 2.3.2). From an etymological viewpoint, the modern French verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ comes from the popular Latin etymon TOCCARE ‘to strike’ and its first use in the modern sense of the verb is attested as of the early 12th century (*TLFi*). The verb has thus undergone a semantic bleaching through which only the semantic feature [CONTACT] has remained from the feature of [VIOLENT CONTACT] entailed by the meaning of TOCCARE ‘to strike’. In modern French, the various senses of the verb can all be accounted for in relation to a literal or figurative interpretation of the notion of contact.

The *TLFi*, as well as Picoche (1986) and Vandeloise (1993, 1996), makes a distinction between the kinetic and static usages of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, that is, the usages denoting a contact resulting from motion and those describing a static contact, that is, a contact for which no motion is involved, as illustrated in (2):

- (2) a. *Les enfants touchent le mur de la maison.*
 the children touch the wall of the house
 ‘The children are touching the wall of the house.’
- b. *L’ église touche le mur de la maison.*
 the church touches the wall of the house
 ‘The church is adjacent to the wall of the house.’

The data given in (2a) exemplify the kinetic usage of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’. The contact between the children and the wall can be interpreted as resulting from motion, that is, the movement done by the children to be in contact with the wall. In (2b), the sentence illustrates the static usage of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’. The verb simply denotes a contact between the subject and the object, a contiguity relationship, without entailing any motion.

For some kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, the notion of contact can be coupled with a dimension relative to the sense of touch, as shown in (3):

- (3) *Elle a touché la robe pour vérifier si elle était en velours.*
 she has touched the dress for to check if it was in velvet
 ‘She touched/felt the dress to check if it was made out of velvet.’

In (3), the use of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ denotes a contact between the subject and the object that entails tactile sensations. In this example, the subject is in contact with the object to determine the type of fabric by using the sense of touch. This reading of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is mainly motivated by the context, but can be latent in some of the direct transitive kinetic usages of the verb, as in (2a), for instance. It should also be noted that the default interpretation of the contact denoted by the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ with

human subjects entails the use of the hands. If the contact involves another part of the body or an intermediate instrument, it is generally specified, as shown in (4):

- (4) a. *Elle a touché du pied l' animal.*
she has touched of.the foot the animal
'She touched the animal with her foot.'
- b. *Elle a touché l' animal avec un bâton.*
she has touched the animal with a stick
'She touched the animal with a stick.'

In (4a), the part of the body involved in the contact denoted by the verb is specified and, in (4b), the stick is interpreted as the instrument that the subject used to be in contact with the object. Vandeloise (1996: 547) notes that *toucher* 'to touch' can denote an indirect contact between the subject and the object, that is, a contact via an intermediate instrument, only if the subject is in control of the instrument, which is the case in (4b).

For some other kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of the verb *toucher* 'to touch', the contact denoted by the verb may be perceived as resulting from a forceful strike, as illustrated in (5) and (6):

- (5) *La bombe a touché le bâtiment.*
the bomb has touched the building
'The bomb hit the building.'
- (6) a. *Il a touché Christian.*
he has touched Christian
'He touched/struck Christian.'
- b. *Il a touché Christian au visage.*
he has touched Christian at/to.the face
'He struck Christian on the face.'

In (5), the contact denoted by *toucher* ‘to touch’, given the semantic nature of the subject, *la bombe* ‘the bomb’, entails that the object has not only been in contact with the subject, but also been affected by it, that is, either partially or totally destroyed. This sense of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is therefore better translated in English with verbs such as *to hit* or *to strike* (see Vandeloise 1996: 544) and is close to the meaning of the etymon of *toucher* ‘to touch’, TOCCARE ‘to strike’. The data given in (6) exemplify a sense of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that can also be read as ‘to strike’. In (6a), the verb can be interpreted as either denoting a simple contact between the subject and the object or a contact that results from a violent blow. When the location of the contact is specified with an adverbial, as in (6b) with *au visage* ‘on the face’, the verb can only be read as ‘to strike’. The meaning of *toucher* ‘to touch’ in (5), (6b) and in one of the interpretations of (6a) therefore entails the consequences that the contact may have on the object, that is, the affectedness of the object, which is not necessarily the case for some other senses of the verb, as in (2), (3) or (4). Furthermore, in cases in which the object can be perceived as a target, the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ can be read as ‘to hit/to reach’, as illustrated in (7):

- (7) a. *La balle a touché le mille.*
 the bullet has touched the bull’s eye
 ‘The bullet reached the bull’s eye.’
 b. *La balle a touché Christian.*
 the bullet has touched Christian
 ‘The bullet hit Christian.’
 c. *La balle a touché Christian à la poitrine.*
 the bullet has touched Christian at/to the chest
 ‘the bullet hit Christian on the chest.’

In (7a), the contact denoted by the verb is the impact between the subject and the target defined by the object, *le mille* ‘the bull’s eye’. In (7b) and (7c), the [+HUMAN] objects can be viewed as targets, as zones of impact, which are often specified, as illustrated in (7c).

For some of the senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’, the contact entailed by the verb is more figurative, metaphorical, as shown by (8):

- (8) a. *Ce film m’a beaucoup touché.*
 this movie me.ACC has much touched
 ‘This movie touched me a lot.’
- b. *Le chômage touche principalement les jeunes.*
 the unemployment touches mainly the young
 ‘Unemployment mainly affects young people.’
- c. *Cette loi touche la question de la liberté d’expression.*
 this law touches the issue of the freedom of expression
 ‘This law concerns the issue of freedom of speech.’
- d. *Il a touché sa bourse.*
 he has touched his scholarship
 ‘He received his scholarship.’
- e. *Il a touché le gros lot.*
 he has touched the jackpot
 ‘He won the jackpot.’

In (8a), the contact entailed by the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ is perceived at a psychological, emotional level, in the sense that the subject is viewed as affecting the object’s emotions. In this example, salience is given to the consequences of the figurative contact on the object, that is, to the emotional affectedness of the object. Similarly, in (8b), the meaning of the verb gives salience to the affectedness of the object, to the point that the meaning

of the verb can only be translated in English with ‘to affect’. In (8c), the figurative contact denoted by *toucher* ‘to touch’ expresses relatedness between the subject and the object. In (8d) and (8e), the figurative contact denoted by the verb is understood as the subject receiving or winning money. When the object is marked by the semantic feature [MONEY], the verb is generally interpreted as ‘to receive/to earn’ or ‘to win’, for gambling games.

The polysemy of *toucher* ‘to touch’, illustrated with the direct transitive construction of the verb in (2)–(8), can also be observed with the indirect transitive construction, as shown in (9):

- (9) a. *Il a touché au téléphone.*
 he has touched at/to.the telephone
 ‘He touched the telephone.’
- b. *Le mur touche à l’église.*
 the wall touches at/to the church
 ‘The wall is adjacent to the church.’
- c. *Ce problème touche à la réforme des universités.*
 this problem touches at/to the reformation of.the universities
 ‘This problem is related to the reformation of universities.’
- d. *Son comportement touche à la folie.*
 his behavior touches at/to the madness
 ‘His behavior borders on madness.’

Similarly to the usages of the direct transitive construction, those of the indirect transitive construction can be kinetic as in (9a) or static, as in (9b)–(9d), on the one hand, literal, as in (9a) and (9b), or figurative, as in (9c) and (9d), on the other hand. In (9a), the verb denotes a contact resulting from motion while, in (9b), it denotes a static contact between

the subject and the object. In (9c), the verb denotes a figurative contact, that is, relatedness between the subject and the object. In (9d), the metaphorical contact entailed by the verb is better described in terms of proximity, in the sense that the subject can be characterized as being close to what the object denotes. In the example given in (9d), the behavior is characterized as being close to what can be defined as madness (see Vandeloise 1993). This usage of *toucher* ‘to touch’ shows that, although the notion of contact is central to the various senses of the verb, there are differences in the way it is viewed in the direct and indirect transitive constructions.

6.1.2. Argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’

The main semantic difference between the kinetic usages of the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ lies in a difference in the perception of the contact entailed by the verb. While, with the direct transitive construction, contact is perceived through a more concrete dimension, with the indirect transitive construction, it is viewed through a more abstract one. Consider the following set of examples in (10):

- (10) a. *Il a touché la peinture.*
 he has touched the painting
 ‘He touched the painting.’
- b. *Il a touché à la peinture.*
 he has touched at/to the painting
 ‘He touched the painting/dabbled in painting.’

The noun phrase *la peinture* can either refer to a concrete item ‘the painting’ or to the activity ‘painting’. With the direct transitive construction, the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ denotes a concrete contact between the subject and the object. In (10a), the noun phrase

la peinture ‘the painting’ is consequently only interpreted in its concrete sense, that is, as a concrete physical object: a painting. In (10b), the contact entailed by the indirect transitive construction is more abstract and the phrase *la peinture* ‘(the) painting’ can be interpreted as either referring to a physical object or to the abstract activity ‘painting’. In the latter case, the sentence is understood as the subject’s having had some experience with the activity ‘painting’.

In general terms, the kinetic usage of the indirect transitive construction of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ entails an abstract dimension associated with the indirect object. This abstract dimension can influence the interpretation of the object, as in (10b), or of the whole construction, in the sense that it entails more than the mere contact between the subject and the object, as illustrated in (11)–(13):

- (11)a. *Il a touché mon dessin.*
 he has touched my drawing
 ‘He touched my drawing.’
- b. *Il a touché à mon dessin.*
 he has touched at/to my drawing.
 ‘He touched my drawing.’ (=‘He modified it. /He displaced it.’)
- (12)a. *Il n’ a pas touché sa soupe.*
 he not has not touched his soup
 ‘He did not touch his soup.’
- b. *Il n’ a pas touché à sa soupe.*
 he not has not touched at/to his soup
 ‘He didn’t touch his soup.’ (=‘He did not eat it.’)

- (13)a. *Ne touche pas mon pote!*
 not touch not my pal
 ‘Don’t touch my pal!’
- b. *Ne touche pas à mon pote!*²¹
 not touch not at/to my pal
 ‘Keep your hands off my pal.’

While the direct transitive construction only denotes a concrete contact between the subject and the object in (11a), (12a) and (13a), the indirect transitive construction in (11b), (12b) and (13b) entails an abstract dimension that influences the reading of the construction. The sentence in (11b) reads, in rough terms, as the subject having been in contact with the drawing and having done something with it or to it, either modified or displaced it. In (11a), the direct construction only denotes that the subject was in contact with the object. The negation in the indirect transitive construction in (12b) entails that the subject did not do anything with the object, that is, in this case, did not eat it. If this interpretation can also be entailed from the direct transitive construction in (12a), it is systematic with the indirect transitive construction. In (12b), not only the contact between the subject and the object, but also the abstract dimension through which it is understood that the subject did something else than touching the object, that is, eating it, are negated. The sentence given in (13b) illustrates a use of the indirect transitive construction of the verb that entails the subject’s being in contact with the object to harm the object. The negative injunction is thus understood as a warning from the speaker to the addressee not to harm the object. In (13a), the negative injunction only concerns a contact between the

²¹ This is the slogan of a French organization fighting racism, *SOS Racisme*.

addressee and the object and does not necessarily entail the addressee's intent to harm the object.

The abstract dimension associated with the objects in (11b), (12b) and (13b) can be assimilated to the expression of an abstract goal (see Chapter 4). The indirect transitive construction of the verb *toucher* 'to touch' in these examples can, indeed, be roughly glossed as 'the subject is in contact with the object to do something with or to the object', with, usually, a negative intent with [+ANIMATE] objects, as in (13), and a more or less neutral intent with [-ANIMATE] objects, as in (11) and (12).

For the static usages, the meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is less obvious. Both structures denote a static contact and the semantic difference between the two is not as clear-cut and systematic as the one observed with the kinetic usages. Consider the following examples:

- (14)a. *La maison touche l' église.*
the house touches the church
'The house is adjacent to the church.'
- b. *La maison touche à l' église.*
the house touches at/to the church
'The house is adjacent to the church.'

The meaning difference between the direct (14a) and indirect (14b) transitive constructions is so subtle that the argument alternations of the static usages of *toucher* 'to touch' could almost be characterized as instances of free alternations. In some contexts, however, the indirect transitive construction tends to be preferred to the direct one, notably when the contact is perceived as less direct or less obvious, as illustrated in (15):

- (15) a. *Oui, la Pologne touche à la mer.*
 yes the Poland touches at/to the sea
 ‘Yes, Poland is in contact with the sea.’

(Grégoire, Henry, Grojean, Oscar & Muhlstein, Anatole, *Le Flambeau*, vol. 2: 1–6, 1919: 437, Brussels)

- b. *?La Pologne touche la mer.*
 the Poland touches the sea
 ‘Poland is in contact with the sea.’

The static indirect transitive construction denotes a contact between the subject and the object which is coupled with a localization of the subject in relation to the object. This localization, expressed by the preposition *à* ‘at/to’, can be viewed as redundant information, since contact entails localization, but can be used to configure a contact that is perceived as less direct, such as in (15a). Given the geographical position of Poland in relation to the sea in 1919, the contact between the country and the sea is not obvious and the localization expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ contributes to the configuration of this contact, which, in the case of Poland at the time, only concerned a very small area. In this context, the sentence in (15b) shows a low level of acceptability, as it spontaneously implies a more direct contact, that is, a larger zone of contact between Poland and the sea.

In contrast to the semantic difference observed with some of the dynamic usages of the verb in the direct and indirect transitive constructions, the meaning difference between the static usages of the two constructions is more subtle. This shows that the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not uniform and needs to be established in relation to the various senses of the verb.

6.2. PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS

In this section, after providing a review of some of the major works on *toucher* ‘to touch’ and its argument alternations, namely Picoche (1986) (section 6.2.1), Vandeloise (1993, 1996) (section 6.2.2) and Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995) and Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) (section 6.2.3), I show the limits of these previous accounts (section 6.2.4).

6.2.1. Picoche (1986)

In her semantic analysis of *toucher* ‘to touch’, Picoche (1986) provides two classifications of the different senses of the verb: the first is based on tense and aspect, while the second is based on the [\pm HUMAN] and [\pm ANIMATE] semantic features of the arguments. In her classification in terms of tense and aspect, she distinguishes three categories: the senses expressing near future (16a), the senses expressing punctual aspect (16b) and the senses expressing the durative aspect (16c).

- (16)a. *Le chantier touche à sa fin.*
the construction touches at/to its end
‘The construction is near its end.’
- b. *La balle touche la cible.*
the bullet touches the target
‘The bullet hits the target.’
- c. *L’ armoire touche le mur.*
the wardrobe touches the wall
‘The wardrobe is adjacent to the wall.’

In (16a), the construction expresses near future, in the sense that the sentence can be interpreted as ‘the construction is going to be over soon’. This temporal dimension is actually far from being systematic with *toucher* ‘to touch’ and is only associated with some fixed phrases such as *toucher au but* ‘to be about to reach one’s goal’, *toucher à sa fin* ‘to be about to reach one’s end’ or the now metaphorical phrase *toucher au port* ‘to be about to reach an end’ (literally, ‘to touch the harbor’) (Picoche 1986; Vandeloise 1993). The sentences given in (16b) and (16c) respectively illustrate the punctual aspect of *toucher* ‘to touch’, associated with the kinetic usages, and the durative aspect of the verb, associated with the static usages.

The second classification of senses Picoche (1986) suggests for *toucher* ‘to touch’ is based on the characterization of the subject and the object in relation to the semantic features [±HUMAN] and [±ANIMATE]. She makes a distinction between the senses resulting from a [+HUMAN] subject and a [-ANIMATE] object (17), from a [-ANIMATE] subject and a [+ANIMATE] object (18) and from a [-ANIMATE] subject and a [-ANIMATE] object (19).

- (17)a. *Christian a touché le tissu pour voir si c’ était*
 Christian has touched the fabric for to see if it was
de la soie.
 some silk.
 ‘Christian touched the fabric to see if it was silk.’
- b. *Christian a touché à la lampe.*
 Christian has touched at/to the lamp
 ‘Christian touched the lamp.’ (=Christian did something with/to the lamp.)
- c. *Dans son article, Christian a touché à ce sujet.*
 in his article Christian has touched at/to this topic
 ‘In his article, Christian dealt with this topic.’

- (18)a. *La branche a touché Christian.*
 the branch has touched Christian
 ‘The branch touched Christian.’
- b. *Ce compliment a touché Christian.*
 this compliment has touched Christian
 ‘This compliment touched Christian.’
- (19)a. *La balle a touché la cible.*
 the bullet has touched the target
 ‘The bullet touched the target.’
- b. *Le lit touche le mur.*
 the bed touches the wall
 ‘The bed is against/next to the wall.’
- c. *L’année scolaire touche à sa fin.*
 the year school touches at/to its end
 ‘The school year is close to its end.’

For the usages of *toucher* ‘to touch’ with a [+HUMAN] subject and a [-ANIMATE] object, Picoche (1986: 61) distinguishes three main senses. First, the subject puts his hand on the object to have a tactile perception of the object, as in (17a). Then, the subject puts his hand on the object and starts to do everything he can do with his hand to the object (i.e., caress it, grab it, use it, destroy it, etc.), as in (17b). Finally, the subject “uses” an abstract object, as in (17c). In this example, the “use” of the abstract object *ce sujet* ‘this topic’ can be read as ‘to deal with’.

For the usages of *toucher* ‘to touch’ with a [-ANIMATE] subject and a [+HUMAN] object, Picoche (1986: 61–62) proposes two main senses: when the subject enters in physical contact with the object, as in (18a), and when the subject causes a psychological modification of the object, as in (18b).

For the usages of *toucher* ‘to touch’ with a [-ANIMATE] subject and a [-ANIMATE] object, Picoche (1986: 62) characterizes three main senses. First, the contact occurs at the end of a movement, as in (19a). Then, the contact is static, as in (19b). Finally, the senses that entail that general “relationships” are reinterpreted as spatial relationships. In (19c), for instance, the temporal relationship between the subject and the object can be reinterpreted as a metaphorical trajectory.

Picoche (1986: 63) observes that the meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is only relevant for the [+HUMAN] subject and [-ANIMATE] object category, that the indirect transitive construction does not exist for the [-ANIMATE] subject and [+ANIMATE] object category and that the meaning difference is neutralized for the [-ANIMATE] subject and [-ANIMATE] object category. She explains that, given that the meaning of the indirect transitive construction is mainly related to intentionality on the part of the subject, it is only relevant to [+HUMAN] subjects.

As seen in section 6.1.2, even though the meaning difference between the static usages of the direct and indirect transitive constructions is subtler than the one observed with the kinetic usages with [+HUMAN] subjects, there is still a difference, which is due to a different sense of *à* ‘at/to’ for the two constructions (see section 6.3).

6.2.2. Vandeloise (1993, 1996)

In two of the most significant studies in the literature on the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, Vandeloise (1993, 1996) focuses on the semantics of the verb (Vandeloise 1996) and on the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in its argument alternations.

In his study on the semantics of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, Vandeloise (1996) observes that “the usage of the verb *toucher* [‘to touch’] (...) is better described by the concept of minimal physical action than by the topological concept of contact” (Vandeloise 1996: 564) and suggests the following kinetic usage rule (T) for the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’: “T: *S touche O* at the instant when a minimal asymmetrical physical action from S to a part of O is noted by the speaker” (Vandeloise 1996: 562). In both his observation and his usage rule, Vandeloise emphasizes the notion of minimal physical action to account for the usages of the verb. He argues that *toucher* ‘to touch’ can be used when the smallest transmission of energy from the subject to the object is involved. Consider the examples given in (20):

- (20)a. *Il a cassé la chaise.*
he has broken the chair
‘He broke the chair.’
- b. *Il a touché la chaise.*
he has touched the chair
‘He touched the chair.’

In contrast to the stronger transmission of energy involved in (20a), the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ in (20b) only entails a minimal transmission of energy. Considering that there is a correlation between the level of energy transmission and the level of affectedness of the object (see section 5.1.2), with *toucher* ‘to touch’, the level of energy transmission is

minimal as the degree of affectedness of the object is. In (20b), the object *la chaise* ‘the chair’ is, indeed, not necessarily perceived as being affected by the action. In comparison, in (20a), the verb entails the affectedness of the object and consequently a higher level of energy transmission.

Vandeloise (1996) refines the usage rule with the concept of *asymmetrical transmission of energy*, which he defines as “an exchange in which one participant is salient because it initiates the exchange” (Vandeloise 1996: 545). For most of the kinetic usages of *toucher* ‘to touch’, the transmission of energy can be viewed as asymmetrical. In (20b), for instance, the subject is the salient participant initiating the action and the transmission of energy is asymmetrical.

Vandeloise (1996) claims that the concept of *asymmetrical transmission of energy* is more appropriate to account for the semantics of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ than the notion of contact. He observes that, if the core semantic value of *toucher* ‘to touch’ was the notion of contact, the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ would be generic to all the verbs implying contact (Vandeloise 1996: 562), as shown in (21):

(21)a. *Le chancelier en colère casse la chaire.*
 the chancellor in ire breaks the desk
 ‘The irate chancellor breaks the desk.’

b. **Le chancelier en colère touche la chaire.*
 the chancellor in ire touches the desk
 ‘The irate chancellor touches the desk.’

(Vandeloise 1996: 561–562, ex. (70))

Vandeloise argues that, although the verb *casser* ‘to break’ (21a) implies a contact, the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not generic to it, as shown by the unacceptability of (21b) (see section 6.2.4 for further discussion).

In his study on the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’, Vandeloise (1993) provides three semantic rules to account for the meaning of the indirect transitive construction *toucher à* ‘to touch’. The first rule concerns the usages for which *toucher* ‘to touch’ denotes an abstract contact: “*T_{à1}*: S touche à O *si S entre en contact abstrait (ou est jugé en contact abstrait) avec la région associée à O*”²² (Vandeloise 1993: 116). This rule covers three types of usages of the verb: when the object refers to an end, when it refers to an excessive mental state and when it refers to an intellectual social activity, respectively illustrated in (22), (23) and (24).

(22)a. *Son mandat touche à sa fin.*
his mandate touches at/to its end
‘His mandate is close to its end.’

b. *Il touche au but.*
he touches at/to.the goal
‘He is close to his goal.’

(23)a. *Son geste touche à la folie.*
his gesture touches at/to the madness
‘His gesture borders on madness.’

b. *Ça touche au génie!*
it touches at/to.the genius
‘It borders on genius!’

²² *T_{à1}*: S touche à O *if S enters in abstract contact (or is judged as being in abstract contact) with the region associated with O.*

- c. ?*Son calme touche à la sérénité.*
 his calmness touches at/to the serenity
 ‘His calmness borders on serenity.’
- (24)a. *Elle a touché à la poésie.*
 she has touched at/to the poetry
 ‘She dabbled in poetry.’
- b. *Il a touché à la littérature.*
 he has touched at/to the literature
 ‘He dabbled in literature.’
- c. ?*Il a touché au cyclisme.*
 he has touched at/to the biking
 ‘?He dabbled in biking.’

The objects *sa fin* ‘its end’ (22a) and *le but* ‘the goal’ (22b) both refer to an end. Vandeloise (1993) argues that *toucher* ‘to touch’ with this type of indirect objects denotes an abstract contact between the subject and the region associated with the object. For usages of the type illustrated in (22a), he claims that the subject enters the abstract region, the period of time, that the word *sa fin* ‘its end’ denotes (Vandeloise 1993: 113). When the object is *le but* ‘the goal’, as in (22b), he asserts that the abstract contact is anticipated (Vandeloise 1993: 114).

For the type of examples in (23), Vandeloise (1993: 115) points out that this usage is only allowed with extreme mental states, such as *la folie* ‘madness’ (23a) and *le génie* ‘genius’ (23b), but is not compatible with less extreme mental states, as shown by the low acceptability of (23c). Vandeloise (1993: 114–115) characterizes the semantics of the extreme mental states in terms of *region*, the mental space to which a noun refers (see Langacker 1991). He argues that this usage of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ denotes an abstract contact between the subject and the region associated with the object and that

this contact is on the outside, meaning that the subject is compared to the outside of the region defined by the mental state, that is, to marginal manifestations of the mental state (Vandeloise 1993: 115). In (23a), for instance, the gesture is compared to a marginal manifestation of madness. It is close to madness and is not characterized as the prototypical manifestation of madness.

The data given in (24) illustrate a usage of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ with intellectual social activities, such as *la poésie* ‘poetry’ (24a) and *la littérature* ‘literature’ (24b). Vandeloise (1993: 116) notes that this usage is not compatible with less intellectual activities, as shown by the low acceptability of (24c) with *le cyclisme* ‘biking’. This usage of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ refers to a temporary, superficial “contact” between the subject and the activity defined by the object, that is, to a trivial practice of the activity. Vandeloise (1993: 116) posits that this usage may be compared to the one illustrated in (23), in the sense that it implies a superficial abstract contact between the subject and the border of the region associated with the object. The subject did not practice the activity seriously and the subject’s experience with the activity is marginal.

The second semantic rule that Vandeloise (1993) proposes for the usages of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ concerns the negation of the practice of a routine associated with the object: “ T_{a2} : S n’a pas touché à 1 O si S n’a pas participé à la routine associée à O”²³ (Vandeloise 1993: 118), illustrated in (25):

(25) *Le chancelier n’ a pas touché à un verre.*
the chancellor not has not touched at/to a glass
‘The chancellor has not touched a glass.’

²³ T_{a2} : S n’a pas touché à 1 O, if S did not participate in the routine associated with O.

The usage of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ in (25) is defined by the negation of the verb and the use of the indefinite article/numeral *un(e)* ‘a(n)/one’. Vandeloise (1993: 117) explains that this usage negates the practice by the subject of the routine associated with the object. In (25), the usage of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ negates the practice of the routine associated with a glass, that is, drinking. Vandeloise (1993: 117) assumes that the expression of the routine associated with the object results from one of the meanings of *à* ‘at/to’. As seen in section 3.3.1, Vandeloise (1987, 1993) argues that the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ substitutes the concrete object with the routine associated with the object.

The third and last semantic rule Vandeloise (1993) provides for the usages of *toucher à* ‘to touch’ is very close to the semantic analysis I suggest for some of the usages of the indirect transitive construction (see sections 6.1.2 and 6.3.2.3): “*T_{ā3}: S touche au/à la/aux O si un contact physique sans transmission d’énergie de S avec O a des conséquences*”²⁴ (Vandeloise 1993: 121). This rule can be illustrated with the contrast between (26a) and (26b):

- (26) a. *Il a touché la lampe.*
 he has touched the lamp
 ‘He touched the lamp.’
- b. *Il a touché à la lampe.*
 he has touched at/to the lamp
 ‘He touched the lamp’ (=He did something to it).

In (26a), the direct transitive construction only denotes a physical contact between the subject and the object. In (26b), the contact denoted by the indirect transitive construction

²⁴ *T_{ā3}: S touche au/à la/aux O if a physical contact without transmission of energy from S with O has consequences.*

is coupled with consequences on the object; the object has been modified or displaced. Vandeloise (1993: 125) argues that the meaning of this usage of the indirect transitive construction results from the preposition *à* ‘at/to’: “(...) la préposition *à* [‘at/to’] remplace *O* par un système ordonné auquel *O* appartient”²⁵ (Vandeloise 1993: 125). With the indirect transitive construction, the subject can be indeed characterized as modifying an orderly system by modifying or displacing the object.

6.2.3. Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995)

As seen in section 3.3.2, Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995), as well as Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996), following Gougenheim (1959), argue that the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is not semantically void and that the central meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ with infinitive constructions can be characterized in terms of “path toward a goal” (Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996: 367).

Concerning the case of *toucher* ‘to touch’, Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995) observe that the meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is relative to a difference in the degree of intention and of volition on the part of the subject (Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer 1995: 213). While the direct transitive construction may refer to an accidental contact, the indirect transitive construction entails intention and volition on the part of the subject. They also note that the meaning of the indirect transitive construction is related to the goal-directed sense that can be observed with other usages of *à* ‘at/to’ (see section 3.3.2).

²⁵ (...) the preposition *à* [‘at/to’] substitutes *O* with an orderly system to which *O* belongs.

6.2.4. Shortcomings of previous accounts

In the context of the present study on the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’, some of the previous analyses raise issues as they fail to account for either the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ (Picoche 1986; see section 6.2.1) or the polysemy of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’. As observed in section 6.2.3, Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995) argue that the meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions is related to intentionality and results from the goal-oriented meaning of *à* ‘at/to’. If this analysis can account for the meaning difference observed with some senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ (see section 6.3.2), it cannot be systematically applied to all the senses of the verb. It is indeed difficult to account for a meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions in term of intentionality, when, for instance, the subjects are inanimate.

Vandeloise’s (1993, 1996) more thorough analysis of *toucher* ‘to touch’ (Vandeloise 1996) and of the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations (Vandeloise 1993) also raises several issues. As seen in section 6.2.2, Vandeloise (1996) argues that the concept of asymmetrical transfer of energy is a better fit than the notion of contact to account for the semantics of *toucher* ‘to touch’ and that the notion of contact is not a sufficient condition to use the verb. His main claim is that the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not generic to all the verbs that imply contact, as illustrated in (27):

- (27) a. *Le professeur prend la craie pour écrire au tableau.*
the professor takes the chalk for to write at/to.the blackboard
‘The professor takes the chalk to write on the blackboard.’

- b. **Le professeur touche la craie pour écrire au tableau.*
 the professor touches the chalk for to write at/to.the
 blackboard
 ‘The professor touches the chalk to write on the blackboard.’
 (Vandeloise 1996: 561, ex. (69))

In (27a), the verb *prendre* ‘to take’ implies contact and Vandeloise (1996: 562) argues that the contrast between (27a) and the unacceptability of (27b) is evidence that contact is not a sufficient condition for the usage of *toucher* ‘to touch’. Sentence (27b) is, however, perfectly acceptable in an appropriate context, as shown in (28):

- (28) – *Pourquoi est-ce que le professeur a les mains blanches?*
 why is it that the professor has the hands white
 – *Parce qu’il touche la craie pour écrire au tableau*
 because he touches the chalk for to write at/to.the blackboard
 ‘Why are the professor’s hands white?’
 ‘Because he touches the chalk to write on the blackboard.’

When using the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, the speaker’s intent is to denote and make salient the contact between two items. The sentence in (27b) may appear pragmatically odd without a context motivating the salience of the contact. In (28), the fact that the professor’s hands are white pragmatically justifies the speaker’s intent to refer and give salience to the contact between the professor and the chalk. Hence, Vandeloise’s statement that contact is not a sufficient condition is untenable.

Vandeloise’s (1993) analysis of the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’ raises issues with respect to the validity of some of the semantic properties he attributes to the preposition *à* ‘at/to’, such as in the rule “ T_{a2} : S n’a

pas touché à 1 O si S n'a pas participé à la routine associée à O"²⁶ (Vandeloise 1993: 118; see section 6.2.2). Vandeloise (1993: 125) claims that, in the type of constructions characterized by his rule, the preposition *à* 'at/to' substitutes the object with the routine associated with it (see section 3.3.1). With regard to the data, however, this analysis turns out to be problematic, as shown by (29):

- (29) a. *Il n' a pas touché à une cigarette depuis 6 mois.*
 he not has not touched at/to a cigarette since 6 months
 'He hasn't touched a cigarette in 6 months.'
- b. *Il n' a pas touché une cigarette depuis 6 mois.*
 he not has not touched a cigarette since 6 months
 'He hasn't touched a cigarette in 6 months.'

The indirect (29a) and direct (29b) transitive constructions both entail that the subject did not smoke, that is, in Vandeloise's terms, did not participate in the routine associated with the object *une cigarette* 'a cigarette'. The acceptability of (29b) shows that the meaning of the construction *S n'a pas touché à 1 O* 'S has not touched 1 O' does not result from *à* 'at/to' substituting the object with the routine that is associated with it, but rather results from the relationship between negation and the notion of contact. With the indirect transitive construction, in (29a), the scope of the negation is on the subject's being in contact with the object to do something with it, that is, in our example, to smoke it (see section 6.1.2). With the direct transitive construction, in (29b), the scope of the negation is only on the subject being in contact with the object, which, in this example, entails that the subject was not in contact with a cigarette and that, consequently, he has not smoked one.

²⁶ T_{a2} : S n'a pas touché à 1 O, if S did not participate in the routine associated with O.

Another issue with Vandeloise's (1993) analysis of the semantic import of *à* 'at/to' in the argument alternations of *toucher* 'to touch' concerns the idiosyncratic nature of his characterization of *à* 'at/to' as substituting the object with an orderly system to which the object belongs (Vandeloise 1993: 125; see section 6.2.2). Vandeloise (1993) does not provide any other examples of *à* 'at/to' playing this role in other contexts than the one of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'.

The limits of the previous studies on the topic under scrutiny in this chapter show that it is necessary that a sound analysis accounts not only for the polysemy of *toucher* 'to touch' and of *à* 'at/to', but also for the relatedness of the various senses of *toucher* 'to touch' around the notion of contact and the relatedness between the meanings of *à* 'at/to' in the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' and those in other contexts.

6.3. SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

In this section, I provide an analysis of the various senses of *toucher* 'to touch', categorized in relation to the meanings of the constructions of the verb from which the various senses derive. In section 6.3.1, I focus on the senses of the direct transitive construction and categorize the senses in relation to the static usages (section 6.3.1.1), the kinetic usages that entail a minimal transfer of energy (section 6.3.1.2) and the kinetic usages that entail a transfer of energy (section 6.3.1.3). In section 6.3.2, I deal with the senses of the indirect transitive construction, categorized into the static usages (section 6.3.2.1), the kinetic usages that express an abstract contact (section 6.3.2.2), the kinetic usages that entail an abstract goal (section 6.3.2.3) and the kinetic usages that entail

proximity (section 6.3.2.4). Finally, in section 6.3.3, I summarize the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’.

6.3.1. The senses of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’

6.3.1.1. Static usages

As seen in section 6.1.1, the various senses of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ are related to the notion of contact and depend not only on the context, but also on the semantic type of argument with which the verb is used. Following Picoche (1986) (see section 6.2.1), I argue that the various senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ can indeed be categorized in relation to the semantic characterization of the subject and the object, as well as to the influence of the general context. This categorization of the various senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is given in Table 6.1, Table 6.2 (see section 6.3.1.2), Table 6.3 (see section 6.3.1.3), Table 6.4 (see section 6.3.2.1), Table 6.5 (see section 6.3.2.2), Table 6.6 (see section 6.3.2.3) and Table 6.7 (see section 6.3.2.4).

Table 6.1 represents the senses of the static usages of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’, at a concrete level (type A) and at a more abstract level (type B).

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
A	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	Motionless	Static physical contact (to be adjacent to, to be in contact with)	<i>La maison touche l'église.</i> 'The house is adjacent to the church.'
B	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE]		Contact (to concern, to deal with)	<i>Le débat touche la question de l'euthanasie.</i> 'The debate concerns the issue of euthanasia.'

Table 6.1: Senses of the static usages of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'

The direct transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' can have a concrete static reading (i.e, 'to be adjacent to', 'to be in contact with') when the subject and the object are both [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] and when no motion is implied by the context or by the shared knowledge of the participants in the discourse. Consider the following examples (30):

- (30)a. *Le toit de la maison touche l' église.*
the roof of the house touches the church
'The roof of the house is adjacent to the church.'
- b. *À cause du tremblement de terre, le toit de la maison*
at/to cause of.the shaking of earth the roof of the house
a touché l' église.
has touched the church
'Because of the earthquake, the roof of the house touched the church.'

The direct transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' with a [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] subject and object in (30a) has a static reading, determined by the shared knowledge of the world, that is, that a roof is usually motionless. In contrast, in (30b), the

direct transitive construction has a kinetic reading, similar to type I (see Table 6.2 in section 6.3.1.2), given that the context (i.e., the earthquake) implies motion.

Another factor that can influence the static or kinetic reading of the verbal construction is aspect, as illustrated in (31):

- (31)a. *Le ballon touche le mur.*
the ball touches the wall
'The ball touches/is against the wall.'
- b. *Le ballon a touché le mur.*
the ball has touched the wall
'The ball touched (was against) the wall.'
- c. *Le ballon touchait le mur.*
the ball touched the wall
'The ball was against (touched) the wall.'

The sentence in (31a), in which aspect is neutral, can either have a static or kinetic reading, depending on the context and/or the shared knowledge of the world. If the two interpretations are also possible in the past with the perfective (31b) or imperfective aspect (31c), the perfective aspect usually favors a kinetic reading, as in (31b), and the imperfective, a static reading, as in (31c).

When the subject and the object are [-CONCRETE] (type B), the notion of contact is perceived at a more abstract level and interpreted as conceptual relatedness between the subject and the object (i.e., 'to concern').

The semantics of the static sense of the direct transitive construction is represented in Figure 6.1, in which the contact between the Trajector and the Landmark represents the motionless contact between the subject and the direct object of the verb,

which is physical at a concrete level (type A) or conceptual at a more abstract level (type B). As compared to the other senses of the direct transitive construction of the verb (see sections 6.3.1.2 and 6.3.1.3), there is no transfer of energy involved and the meaning of the verb is very close to the one of a preposition (see Vandeloise 1993, 1996), in the sense that it simply configures a spatial relationship (i.e., contact) between the Trajector and the Landmark.

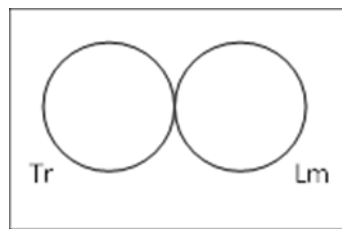


Figure 6.1: Schema of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ with no transfer of energy

6.3.1.2. Kinetic usages that entail a minimal transfer of energy

As seen in section 6.2.2, Vandeloise (1996) proposes a semantic rule that includes the concept of “minimal asymmetrical physical action” (Vandeloise 1996: 562) to account for the meaning of *toucher* ‘to touch’. Although this rule cannot be applied to all the senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ (see section 6.1.1), some senses of the direct transitive construction can be characterized in terms of a minimal transfer of energy, in the sense that the construction entails the minimal level of affectedness of the object (i.e., unspecified change; see Beavers 2010). Table 6.2 summarizes the kinetic senses of the

direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a minimal transfer of energy.

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
C	[+ANIMATE]	[+ANIMATE]		Physical contact (<i>to touch</i>)	<i>Christian a touché Emma.</i> ‘Christian has touched Emma.’
D	[+ANIMATE]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]		Physical contact (<i>to touch</i>)	<i>Il a touché la table.</i> ‘He touched the table.’
E	[+HUMAN]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	Tactile sense	Tactile contact (<i>to touch, to feel</i>)	<i>Il a touché le tissu.</i> ‘He touched the fabric.’
F	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE]		Contact (<i>to touch</i>)	<i>Il touche le bonheur.</i> ‘He touches happiness.’
G	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [TOPIC]		Contact (<i>to deal with</i>)	<i>Il touche un problème délicat.</i> ‘He deals with a delicate issue.’
H	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [MONEY]		Contact (<i>to receive, to earn</i>)	<i>Il a touché l’argent.</i> ‘He received the money.’
I	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	[+ANIMATE]		Physical contact (<i>to touch</i>)	<i>Le ballon a touché Christian.</i> ‘The ball touched Christian.’
J	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE]	Motion	Physical contact (<i>to touch</i>)	<i>Le ballon a touché le sol.</i> ‘The ball touched the ground.’

Table 6.2: Senses of the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a minimal transfer of energy

The subjects of the direct transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a minimal transfer of energy can be either [+ANIMATE] (types C–D), [+HUMAN] (types E–H) or [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] (types I–J). With [+ANIMATE] objects, the verb expresses a physical contact (types C and I). With [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] objects, the verb can also express a physical contact (types D, E and J). Depending on the context, the physical contact can be coupled with the sense of touch (type E; see section 6.1.1). Furthermore, as seen in section 6.3.1.1, the kinetic reading of type I depends on

whether motion is contextually implied. With [-CONCRETE] objects, the verb denotes a figurative contact (types F–H) and the senses vary in relation to the semantic properties of the object. If the object can be viewed as a topic of discussion, the verb reads as ‘to deal with’ (type G). If a [-CONCRETE] object is marked by the semantic feature [MONEY], the verb is read as ‘to receive/to earn’ (type H). Note that this reading of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is only available for the abstract representation of money, that is, the monetary value, as illustrated in (32):

- (32) *Il a touché un billet de 500 euros.*
 he has touched a bill of 500 euro
 ‘He touched/received a 500 euro bill.’

In (32), if the object is perceived from a concrete viewpoint, the verb is read as ‘to touch’. If it is perceived from an abstract viewpoint, the viewpoint of its monetary value, the verb is then read as ‘to receive/to earn’.

The meaning of the direct transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a minimal transfer of energy is represented in Figure 6.2. In contrast to the static usages of the verb (see Figure 6.1 in section 6.3.1.1), the kinetic usages of the verb entail a temporal dimension²⁷ represented by *t* through which it is understood that the concrete or abstract motion of the Trajector results in a concrete or abstract contact with the Landmark. In contrast to the prototypical transitive construction (see section 2.1.2), the senses studied in this section only involve a minimal transfer of energy, represented by

²⁷ Langacker (2008) argues that events entailing motion can be decomposed through a temporal dimension. In the figures in which the temporal dimension is indicated (*t*), the temporal decomposition of the event goes from left to right. In Figure 6.2, for instance, the motion of the Trajector toward the Landmark (left part of the schema) precedes the contact between the Trajector and the Landmark (right part of the schema).

the dashed arrow in Figure 6.2, which entails a minimal level of affectedness of the object.

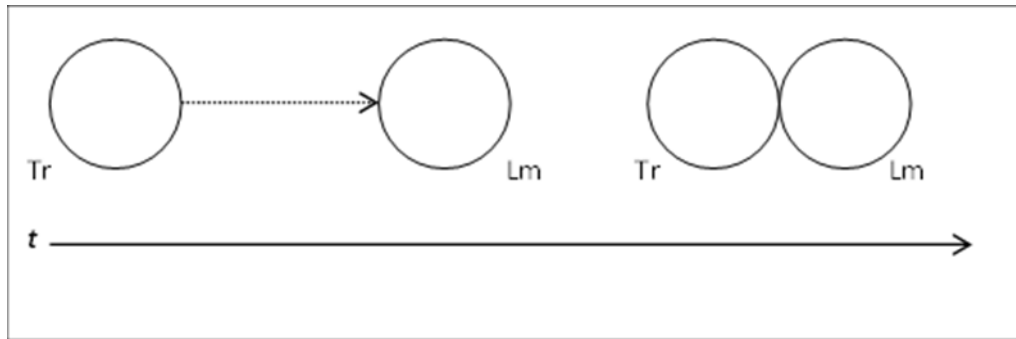


Figure 6.2: Schema of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ with a minimal transmission of energy

6.3.1.3. Kinetic usages that entail a transfer of energy

As seen in section 5.1.2, the transfer of energy involved in a direct transitive construction correlates with the affectedness of the object. The senses of the direct transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a transfer of energy thus entail the affectedness of their objects, which is represented in Table 6.3 with the feature [+AFFECTED]²⁸.

²⁸ The feature [+AFFECTED] is to be understood here as “showing a change of state” (see Beavers 2010, 2011).

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
K	[+HUMAN]	[+ANIMATE] [+AFFECTED]		Forceful physical contact (to hit, to strike)	<i>Christian a touché le colonel.</i> ‘Christian hit the colonel.’
L	[+HUMAN]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE] [+AFFECTED]		Forceful physical contact (to hit, to strike)	<i>Ils ont touché la ville.</i> ‘They hit the city.’
M	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE] [+FORCE]	[+ANIMATE] [+AFFECTED]		Forceful physical contact (to hit, to strike)	<i>La balle a touché Christian.</i> ‘The bullet hit Christian.’
N	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE] [+FORCE]	[-ANIMATE] [+CONCRETE] [+AFFECTED]		Forceful physical contact (to hit, to strike)	<i>La bombe a touché la ville.</i> ‘The bomb hit the city.’
O	[-CONCRETE]	[+HUMAN] [+AFFECTED]		Contact (to affect)	<i>L'alcoolisme touche les jeunes.</i> ‘Alcoholism affects the young.’
P	[-CONCRETE]	[+HUMAN] [+AFFECTED]	Emotion	Contact (to touch, to move)	<i>Sa tristesse m'a touché.</i> ‘His sadness touched me.’
Q	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE] [+AFFECTED]		Contact (to affect)	<i>Cette mesure touche le temps de travail.</i> ‘This measure affects working hours.’

Table 6.3: Senses of the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that entail a transfer of energy

The subjects of the direct transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a transfer of energy can be [+HUMAN] (types K and L), [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] (types M and N) or [-CONCRETE] (types O–Q). With [+HUMAN] subjects, the verb denotes a forceful physical contact, which results in the affectedness of the object, either [+ANIMATE] or [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE]. As observed in section 6.1.1,

when the subject is [+HUMAN] (types K and L), this usage of *toucher* ‘to touch’ often implies the use of an instrument (i.e., a weapon).

The [-ANIMATE] and [+CONCRETE] subjects (types M and N) need to be perceived as being able to initiate a transfer of energy and are consequently marked by the feature [+FORCE]. Only subjects that can be conceived as a destructive force (e.g., a weapon) can indeed entail the affectedness of the object.

With [-CONCRETE] subjects, the different senses of the verb mainly depend on the context. With [+HUMAN] objects, the verb entails affectedness, which may be either at an emotional level (type P) or at a more general level (type O). For these senses, the subject needs to be perceived as a conceptual force that may have consequences on the state (emotional or other) of the object. Consider the following data:

- (33) a. *Le chômage touche les jeunes.*
the unemployment touches the young
‘Unemployment affects the young.’
- b. *?L’emploi touche les jeunes.*
the employment touches the young
‘?Employment affects the young.’
- c. *Sa mort m’ a beaucoup touché.*
his death me.ACC has much touched
‘His death touched me a lot.’
- d. *Ta lettre m’ a beaucoup touché.*
your letter me.ACC has much touched
‘Your letter touched me a lot.’
- e. *?Ta chaise m’ a beaucoup touché.*
your chair me.ACC has much touched
‘?Your chair touched me a lot.’

In (33a), *le chômage* ‘unemployment’ can be viewed as a force having negative consequences on the object. It should be noted that, when this usage of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not related to emotions, the subject needs to be perceived as having potential negative consequences on the object. As shown by the low acceptability of (33b), this sense of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not really available with subjects implying positive consequences. At the emotional level, the consequences on the psychological state of the object can be perceived as either negative, as in (33c), or positive in (33d). The emotional reading of the verb mainly depends on the context, and more specifically, on the conceptualization of the arguments in relation to the shared knowledge of the world. Note that, even though some items can appear in the subject position for this sense (i.e., a letter in (33d)), they are usually viewed through an abstract dimension (i.e., the content of the letter in (33d)). As shown by the low acceptability of (33e), the emotional sense of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is not compatible with subjects that are inherently concrete.

When the object is [-CONCRETE], two interpretations are available, depending on whether or not the subject can be viewed as a conceptual force. When the subject is perceived as having consequences on the object (type Q), the reading of the verb is very close to the one for type O. When it is not, the verb denotes a conceptual relatedness between the subject and the object (type G; see section 6.3.1.2).

The meaning of the direct transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that involve a transfer of energy is represented in Figure 6.3. The transfer of energy initiated

by the Trajector results in the contact of the Trajector with the Landmark and the affectedness of the Landmark.

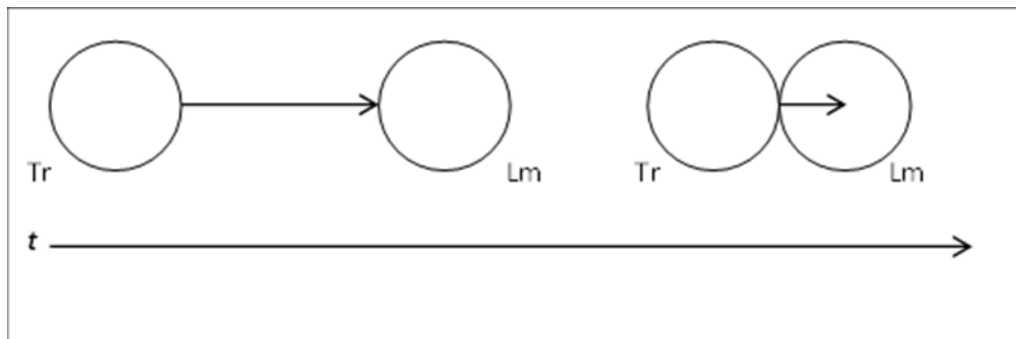


Figure 6.3: Schema of the direct transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' with a transmission of energy

6.3.2. Senses of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'

6.3.2.1. Static usages

As seen in section 6.1.2, some of the usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' can be static. Table 6.4 summarizes the senses of the static usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'.

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
A'	[+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE]	[+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE]		Static contact (to be adjacent to, to be in contact with)	<i>La maison touche à l'église.</i> 'The house is adjacent to the church.'
B'	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE]	No modification involved	Contact (to be related to)	<i>C'est une affaire qui touche à la liberté d'expression.</i> 'It is an affair that is related to freedom of speech.'

Table 6.4: Senses of the static usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'

With [+CONCRETE] and [-ANIMATE] subjects (type A'), the indirect transitive construction is only compatible with [+CONCRETE] and [-ANIMATE] objects and denotes a static physical contact between the subject and the object.

With [-CONCRETE] subjects (type B'), the verb denotes a contact at a more abstract level, that is, conceptual relatedness, in a similar fashion to the sense of the verb for type B (see section 6.3.1.1). This reading is only available if the context does not imply a modification of the object. If a modification of the object is contextually implied, the sense of this type of construction is similar to the one suggested for type K' (see section 6.3.2.3).

Figure 6.4 represents the concrete static usage of the indirect transitive construction (types A'). In this construction, *à* 'at/to' expresses a localization of the Trajector in relation to the Landmark, which is coupled with a contact between the Trajector and the Landmark, as denoted by the lexical semantics of the verb (see section 6.1.2). This figure serves as a basis for more abstract static usages (types B') for which

the contact between an abstract subject and an abstract object is perceived as the expression of a conceptual relatedness between the two arguments of the verb.

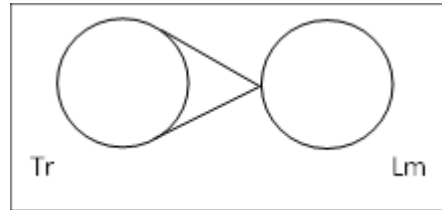


Figure 6.4: Schema of the static usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'

6.3.2.2. Kinetic usages that entail an abstract contact

Table 6.5 summarizes the senses of the indirect transitive construction that entail an abstract contact. The indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' only entails the notion of contact when the subject is [+HUMAN] and when the objects are marked by a specific semantic feature, that is [ARTISTIC PRACTICE] (type C'), [DRUGS] (type D'), [±HAPPINESS] (type E') or [TOPIC] (type F').

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
C'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [ARTISTIC PRACTICE]		Contact (to dabble in, to touch)	<i>Il a touché à la photographie.</i> 'He dabbled in photography.'
D'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [DRUGS]		Contact (to dabble in, to touch)	<i>Il a touché à la cocaïne.</i> 'He dabbled in cocaine.'
E'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [±HAPPINESS]		Contact (to dabble in, to touch)	<i>Il a touché au bonheur.</i> 'He touched happiness.'
F'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [TOPIC]		Contact (to bring up)	<i>L'auteur touche à la question de l'euthanasie.</i> 'The author brings up the issue of euthanasia.'

Table 6.5: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' that entail an abstract contact

The sense suggested for type C' is very close to the one suggested by Vandeloise (1993) for intellectual social activities (see section 6.2.2). The feature [ARTISTIC PRACTICE] is, however, more appropriate than the concept of intellectual social activities, as illustrated by the low acceptability of (34):

- (34)?*Il a touché au débat.*
 he has touched at/to.the debate
 'He dabbled in debating.'

The sentence given in (34) has a low level of acceptability even though *débat* 'debate' can be characterized as an intellectual social activity.

For type D', the object refers to any substance that can be considered as a source of addiction, including tobacco and alcohol.

For type E', the object is marked by the feature [±HAPPINESS], that is, either refers to happiness (e.g., *bonheur* 'happiness', *joie profonde* 'deep joy', etc.) or unhappiness (e.g., *malheur* 'unhappiness', *misère* 'misery', etc.).

For type F', the object refers to a topic of discussion and the sense (i.e., 'to bring up') is more dynamic than the one for type B' (i.e., 'to be related to') (see section 6.3.2.1).

Figure 6.5 represents the meaning of the indirect transitive constructions that entail an abstract contact. The Trajector initiates a transfer of energy that results in a contact between the Trajector and the Landmark, which is coupled with the notion of abstract localization conveyed by *à* 'at/to' (see section 5.1.1). The Landmark characterized by *à* 'at/to' is abstract and only noun phrases marked by a set of abstract semantic features can instantiate it. The Trajector is thus perceived as being in contact with an abstract Landmark and this contact is interpreted as either the Trajector experiencing (types C', D' and E') or dealing with (type F') what the Landmark denotes. Consider the following set of examples:

- (35) a. *Il a touché la cocaïne.*
 he has touched the cocaine
 'He touched the cocaine.'
- b. *Il a touché à la cocaïne.*
 he has touched at/to the cocaine
 'He touched the cocaine/dabbled in cocaine.'

The examples given in (35) contrast the meaning of the direct (35a) and the indirect (35b) transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch'. As mentioned in section 6.1.2, when an object can either refer to a concrete or abstract entity, the direct transitive construction triggers a concrete reading of the object and the indirect transitive construction, either a concrete or an abstract reading. The construction in (35b) is therefore ambiguous and can

be interpreted either as the subject modifying/displacing a concrete object (type H'; see section 6.3.2.3) or experiencing the activity associated with the object. In context, if the object is viewed as abstract, the meaning of the construction corresponds to the one represented in Figure 6.5; if it is viewed as concrete, it corresponds to the one represented in Figure 6.6 (see section 6.3.2.3).

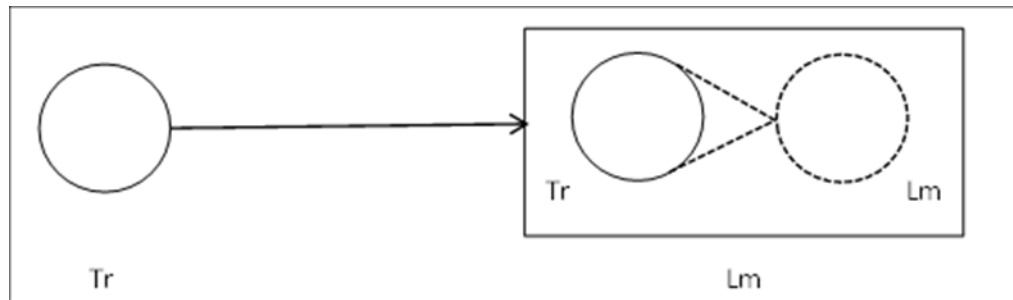


Figure 6.5: Schema of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ that entail an abstract contact

6.3.2.3. Kinetic usages that entail an abstract goal

As seen in section 6.1.2, some usages of the indirect transitive construction entail an abstract goal that can be glossed as “the subject being in contact with the object to do something to or with the object”. Table 6.6 summarizes these senses.

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
G'	[+HUMAN]	[+HUMAN]		Harmful contact (to harm)	<i>Il a touché à ma sœur!</i> 'He laid a finger on my sister!'
H'	[+HUMAN]	[+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE]		Contact with implicit consequences (to touch, to tamper with)	<i>Il a touché à mon téléphone.</i> 'He touched/tampered with my phone.'
I'	[+HUMAN]	[+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE]	Negative polarity	Contact with implicit action (to use, to consume)	<i>Il a à peine touché à son repas.</i> 'He barely touched his meal.'
J'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE]		Contact with implicit consequences (to tamper with)	<i>Ils ont touché à la loi.</i> 'They tampered with the law.'
K'	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE]	Modification involved	Abstract contact with implicit consequences (to tamper with)	<i>Cette mesure touche aux droits fondamentaux.</i> 'This measure tampers with fundamental rights.'

Table 6.6: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' that entail an abstract goal

For the sense with [+HUMAN] objects (type G'), the verb entails a violent contact, or, in other words, a contact with negative consequences on the object. Similarly, with [+CONCRETE] and [-ANIMATE] objects (type H'), the verb usually entails negative consequences on the object. Consider the examples in (36):

- (36) a. *Mon ordinateur ne fonctionne plus parce que ma fille*
my computer not functions more because my daughter
y a touché.
there has touched
'My computer no longer works because my daughter touched it.'

- b. ?*Mon ordinateur fonctionne très bien parce que ma fille*
 my computer functions very well because my daughter
 y a touché.
 there has touched
 ‘?My computer works very well because my daughter touched it.’

In (36), the example implying negative consequences on the object (36a) is much more natural than the example implying positive consequences (36b). When negative polarity is involved, either with a negative or restrictive adverb (type I’), the reading of the indirect transitive construction no longer entails negative consequences and is globally understood as ‘to use/to consume’.

With [-CONCRETE] objects, when it is contextually implied that they are modified (see section 6.3.2.3), the verb can also entail a contact with negative consequences on the objects (types J’ and K’).

Figure 6.6 represents the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ for which the sense of the verb implies implicit consequences on the object. The figure includes the representation of the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal (see section 4.1.1). The contact between the subject/Trajector and the object/Landmark, resulting from motion, integrates the Trajector of *à* ‘at/to’. Through the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’, the contact is oriented toward an abstract goal, an abstract dimension surrounding the object/Landmark. In other words, the subject enters in contact with the object in order to do something with it. The abstract dimension surrounding the object, that is, what the subject does to the object, is left unspecified; the object may have been modified, displaced, used, broken, eaten, and so on.

In Figure 6.6, the Landmark is assumed to be affected. The Trajector initiates a transfer of energy that results both in a contact with the Landmark and the affectedness of the object. At first sight, this assumption may appear to contradict Beavers's (2010: 848) Morphosyntactic Alignment Principle, in the sense that the indirect transitive construction of a given verb entails a higher level of affectedness than the direct one (see sections 2.2.2 and 5.1.2). Indeed, with some minimal pairs contrasting the direct and indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* 'to touch', the indirect transitive construction entails potential affectedness, while the direct one does not, as shown in (37) and (38):

- (37)a. *Il a touché mon ordinateur.*
 he has touched my computer
 'He touched my computer.'
- b. *?Ce qui est arrivé à mon ordinateur, c' est qu' il l' a touché.*
 this that is arrived at/to my computer it is that he it
 has touched
 '?What happened to my computer is that he touched it.'
- (38)a. *Il a touché à mon ordinateur.*
 he has touched at/to my computer
 'He touched/tampered with my computer.'
- b. *Ce qui est arrivé à mon ordinateur, c' est qu' il y a touché.*
 this that is arrived at/to my computer it is that he
 there has touched
 '?What happened to my computer is that he touched it.'

The direct transitive construction in (37a) entails unspecified affectedness and is incompatible with the affectedness test (37b) suggested by Cruse (1973: 13) (see section

2.2.2). Conversely, the indirect transitive construction in (38a) entails potential affectedness, that is, a higher level of affectedness than the direct transitive construction, and is compatible with Cruse's (1973) test (38b).

The fact that the degree of affectedness is higher with the indirect transitive construction in (38) than with the direct transitive construction in (37) can be accounted for in relation to the degree of transmission of energy and of agentivity. As observed by Dowty (1991), one of the characteristics of the proto-agent is volition (see also Næss 2008; section 2.2.3). It can thus be argued that a volitional agent presents a higher degree of agentivity than a non-volitional agent, since a volitional agent is closer to the prototypical agent. Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer (1995) and Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (1996) note that the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' entails intentionality on the part of the subject, while the direct one does not necessarily. This characteristic results from the use of *à* 'at/to' as the expression of a goal, which entails a characterization of the subject in terms of intentionality and volition. In the indirect transitive construction, the subject therefore shows a higher degree of agentivity than in the direct one. Considering that the degree of transmission of energy correlates with the level of agentivity, it can be argued that the subject of the indirect transitive construction in (38) initiates a higher level of transmission of energy than the subject of the direct one in (37).

Given that the indirect transitive construction represented in Figure 6.6 entails a transmission of energy that is not minimal, Beavers's (2010) Morphosyntactic Alignment Principle should be considered with regard to the senses of the direct transitive

constructions that entail a transmission of energy that is not minimal, that is, the senses of the direct transitive constructions that are based on the representation given in Figure 6.3. For these senses, the entailed affectedness can be characterized as non-quantized change. The subject is, indeed, viewed as a destructive force that initiates a transmission of energy and necessarily affects the object. Based on this meaning of the direct transitive construction, the meaning of the indirect transitive construction represented in 6.6 entails a lower level of affectedness.

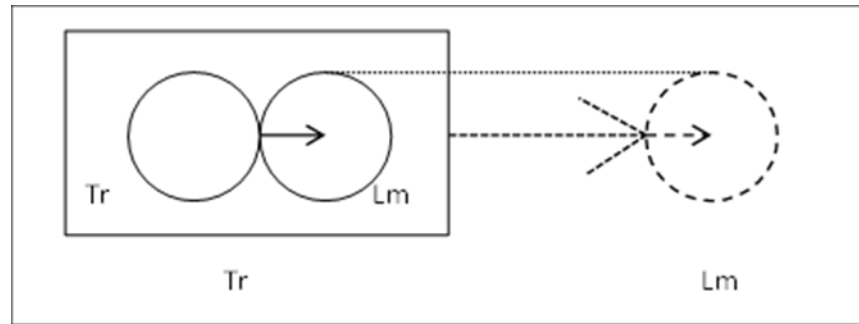


Figure 6.6: Schema of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' entailing an abstract goal

6.3.2.4. Kinetic usages that entail proximity

Table 6.7 summarizes the senses of the indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* 'to touch' that entail proximity. The notion of proximity is to be understood at either a temporal level, that is, in terms of prospection, or at an abstract level, in terms of conceptual proximity.

TYPE	SUBJECT	OBJECT	CONTEXT	SENSE	EXAMPLE
L'	[+HUMAN]	[-CONCRETE] [END]		Prospective contact (to near)	<i>Christian touche au but.</i> 'Christian is close to his goal.'
M'	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE] [END]		Prospective contact (to near)	<i>Ce projet touche à sa fin.</i> 'This project is nearing the end.'
N'	[-CONCRETE]	[-CONCRETE] [EXTREME STATE]		Conceptual proximity (to border on)	<i>Cette idée touche au génie.</i> 'This idea borders on genius.'

Table 6.7: Senses of the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' that entail proximity

The reading of the indirect transitive construction in terms of proximity is only available for objects that are marked either by the feature [END] (types L' and M') or [EXTREME STATE] (type N'). For the senses of types L' and M', the notion of proximity can be interpreted as the subject being "close to an end". For the sense in type N', the notion of proximity is interpreted at a conceptual level, expressing a comparison between the subject and the extreme state denoted by the object (see section 6.2.2 and Vandeloise 1993).

Figure 6.7 represents the usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* 'to touch' that denote proximity between the subject and the object (types L', M' and N'). In this construction, the meaning of *à* 'at/to' can be characterized as allative in the sense that it expresses the motion of the Trajector toward the Landmark. Through this meaning of *à* 'at/to', the notion of contact entailed by the lexical meaning of the verb is viewed as prospective, in a temporal dimension to come. This meaning of the indirect transitive construction is not productive for spatial senses. It is only found in certain expressions, such as *toucher au port* 'to be about to reach an end' (see section 6.2.1). For temporal

senses, this meaning is only productive with objects that express an end (types L' and M'). This schema can be used as a conceptual basis to represent the meaning of the indirect transitive construction that denotes a conceptual proximity between the subject and the object (type N'). The subject is characterized as being close to the extreme mental state that the object denotes.

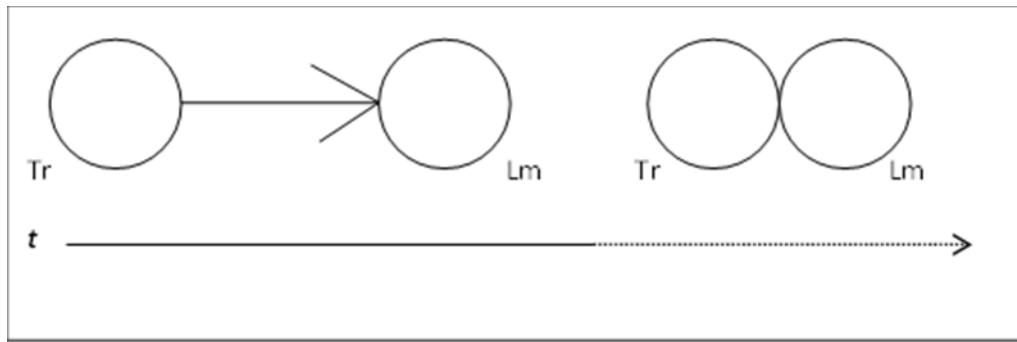


Figure 6.7: Schema for the usages of *toucher* 'to touch' entailing proximity

6.3.3. The semantic import of *à* 'at/to' in the argument alternations of *toucher* 'to touch'

In the case of the argument alternations of *toucher* 'to touch', the semantic import of *à* 'at/to' is not uniform and results from various meanings of the preposition, namely, the expression of abstract localization, the expression of an abstract goal and allation.

In the static usages of the indirect transitive construction (see section 6.3.2.1), *à* ‘at/to’ expresses a static localization between the Trajector and the Landmark, which can be interpreted at a concrete level (type A’) or at a more abstract level (type B’). Although the meaning difference between the static direct and indirect transitive constructions are very subtle, the static indirect transitive construction tends to be preferred to the direct one when the physical contact denoted by the verb is perceived as less direct (see section 6.1.2). This analysis is also valid for the more figurative usages of the static transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ (types B and B’), as illustrated in (39):

- (39)a. *Cette thèse touche le problème du sémantisme de à.*
 this thesis touches the issue of.the semantics of at/to
 ‘This thesis deals with the issue of the semantics of *à*.’
- b. *Cette thèse touche au problème du sémantisme de à.*
 this thesis touches at/to.the issue of.the semantics of at/to
 ‘This thesis is related to the issue of the semantics of *à*.’

In (39a), the conceptual contact denoted by the direct transitive construction is perceived as direct, in the sense that the thesis directly deals with the issue. With the indirect transitive construction in (39b), the conceptual contact between the subject and the object is perceived as less direct. The thesis does not necessarily deal with the issue but deals with a topic that is related to the issue. This analysis of the role of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of a localization is very close to the one of *à* ‘at/to’ expressing an abstract localization (see Chapter 5). In (39b), the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be roughly glossed as ‘to be related to’.

The semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in the static usages of the indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ is similar to the one observed with the kinetic indirect transitive constructions that entail an abstract contact (see section 6.3.2.2). The abstract localization expressed by *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized as the expression of an abstract contact. The abstract contact can be interpreted as conceptual relatedness (type B’) or be perceived as the subject’s experiencing the activity associated with the object (types C’ and D’) or the state denoted by the object (E’).

For other kinetic usages (see section 6.3.2.3), *à* ‘at/to’ expresses an abstract goal (see Chapter 4). The contact denoted by the verb is coupled with an abstract goal surrounding the object, which can be interpreted as the subject’s being in contact to do something to or with the object. In these constructions, the contact systematically has consequences on the object.

Finally, *à* ‘at/to’ can be used to express allation in some indirect transitive constructions. The allative *à* ‘at/to’ is no longer productive in a concrete spatial sense, as this sense of *à* ‘at/to’ can only be found in certain phrases, such as *toucher au port* ‘to be about to reach an end’. In the indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’, the allative *à* ‘at/to’ is interpreted at an abstract level and expresses prospection with objects marked by the semantic feature [END] (types L’ and M’) or comparison with objects marked by the semantic feature [EXTREME STATE] (type N’).

6.4. SUMMARY

In section 6.1, I characterized *toucher* ‘to touch’ as presenting a case of polysemy. I argued that all the senses of the verb were related to a common notion, the notion of contact. I also pointed out some of the main meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verb.

In section 6.2, I reviewed some of the major studies in the literature on *toucher* ‘to touch’ (Picoche 1986; Vandeloise 1993, 1996; Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot & Kemmer 1995; Kemmer & Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot 1996). I showed that the shortcomings of the previous studies make it necessary for any sound analysis of the argument alternations of *toucher* ‘to touch’ to account for the polysemy of the verb and of *à* ‘at/to’ and to avoid an idiosyncratic characterization of the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in these alternations.

In section 6.3, I categorized the senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ into the static usages of the direct transitive construction, the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction that entail a minimal transfer of energy, the kinetic usages of the direct transitive construction that entail a transfer of energy, the static usages of the indirect transitive construction, the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction that entail an abstract contact, the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction that entail an abstract goal and the kinetic usages of the indirect transitive construction that entail proximity and I provided a semantic analysis for each category. I demonstrated that, in the indirect transitive constructions of the verb, *à* ‘at/to’ can express a concrete or an abstract localization, an abstract goal or allation at an abstract level.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this study, I have demonstrated that the meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of some verbs can be related to the semantics of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. In Chapter 2, following the Cognitive Grammar theoretical framework defined by Langacker (1987b, 1991, 2008), I have assumed that grammar is meaningful and that meaning can be defined in relation to a continuum opposing lexical meaning (i.e., specific meaning) and grammatical meaning (i.e., abstract meaning). Considering the limits of the theory, I have pointed out that the notion of affectedness, a key parameter in the study of argument realization and, more specifically, argument alternations (Beavers 2010, 2011), needed to be integrated within the theoretical framework. I have also claimed that the soundest approach to the semantic representations of prepositions is the prototype-based polysemic approach, such as the principled polysemy theory (Tyler & Evans 2003), in which it is assumed that the various senses of a given spatial preposition show family resemblance and are based on the original spatial meaning of the preposition.

In Chapter 3, after characterizing the morphosyntactic properties of *à* ‘at/to’ and partially reviewing its grammaticalization (Kilroe 1987), in order to illustrate the numerous syntactic uses and the senses of the preposition, I have discussed the similarities between the prototype-based theories and the theory of grammaticalization in their account of the relatedness of senses. I have concluded that the semantic representations of the senses of *à* ‘at/to’ should be based on family resemblance and that the representations of the more abstract senses should be based on the more concrete

ones, no matter whether the relatedness of senses of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ is synchronically relevant or not. I have also reviewed some of the major works found in the literature on the meaning of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ and have shown the limits of a semantic characterization of *à* ‘at/to’ in terms of core meaning. I have assumed that *à* ‘at/to’ has various senses, which need to be specified in relation to the semantic contribution of the preposition in a given construction.

In Chapter 4, I have demonstrated that the meaning differences between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of some verbs (e.g., *aspirer/aspirer à* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’, *parer/parer à* ‘to ward off/to guard against’, *viser/viser à* ‘to aim’, etc.) can be related to the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal. I have argued that the abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized as grammatical meaning and that the lexical meaning of a verb and the grammatical meaning of the preposition interact at various levels. In some cases, while the direct transitive construction does not entail the notion of goal, the indirect transitive construction does, showing that the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ contributes to the meaning of the construction. In other cases, the lexical meaning of the verb entails the notion of goal and this may account for why it triggers the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal. I have assumed that the various levels of interaction between lexical and grammatical meanings can be represented with a continuum. At one pole of this continuum, the lexical meaning of the verb reflects the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ (e.g., *aspirer* ‘to breathe in/to aspire’, for which the lexical meaning of the verb in the indirect construction expresses a goal). At the other pole, the grammatical meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ reflects the lexical meaning of the

verb (e.g., *viser* ‘to aim’, for which the lexical meaning of the verb entails the notion of goal in both the direct and indirect transitive constructions).

In Chapter 5, I have demonstrated that, for some cases of argument alternations (e.g., *applaudir* ‘to applaud’, *contredire* ‘to contradict’, *insulter* ‘to insult’, etc.) the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ can be characterized in terms of abstract localization. In contrast to the direct transitive construction of a given verb, the lexical semantics of the verb in the indirect transitive construction can be interpreted as “in relation to” the nominal phrase introduced by *à* ‘at/to’. For instance, with the direct transitive construction of the verb *contredire* ‘to contradict’, the subject is interpreted as contradicting, invalidating the underlying rationale of the object, while with the indirect construction, the subject is perceived as a contradiction in relation to the underlying rationale of the object. Assuming that all transitive verbs entail a transfer of energy, I have argued that this energy can be viewed as a scalar notion and that it should be specified for each verb. I have proposed a correlation between the level of energy involved in an event and the level of affectedness of the object. I have shown that the semantic entailments of the affectedness of the object in the direct transitive constructions of some verbs are not found in the indirect transitive constructions. For instance, the direct transitive construction of *insulter* ‘to insult’ entails affectedness that can be interpreted as “the integrity of the object has been debased”, which is not the case with the indirect transitive construction of the verb. I have concluded that *à* ‘at/to’ signals a disruption of energy in the indirect transitive constructions, which accounts for the meaning differences related to affectedness between the direct and indirect constructions of some verbs.

In Chapter 6, I have shown that, for the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, the various senses of the indirect transitive constructions of the verb, in comparison to those of the direct transitive constructions, can all be related to the semantics of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’. After showing the limits of previous analyses of the semantics of *à* ‘at/to’ in the argument alternations of the verb *toucher* ‘to touch’, I have demonstrated that the basic senses of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive constructions of these verbs are the expression of an abstract goal and of an abstract localization and that the interplay between these meanings and the senses of *toucher* ‘to touch’ can account for all the interpretations of the indirect transitive constructions of the verb.

Although I do not analyze all the verbs displaying argument alternations, I have demonstrated that, for many cases of argument alternations, *à* ‘at/to’ cannot be characterized as a meaningless preposition and contributes semantically to the meaning of the indirect transitive constructions. The semantic import of the preposition in argument alternations therefore questions the lexical/functional dichotomy used to categorize prepositions (see Introduction). As the semantic contribution of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations is quite abstract, the preposition cannot be characterized as neither lexical nor functional, which reinforces Tseng’s (2000) assumption that prepositions should be categorized in relation to a continuum and Langacker’s (1987b) assumption that grammar is meaningful. I have indeed demonstrated that the so-called grammatical use of *à* ‘at/to’, characterizable as the head of a functional phrase with the verbs I analysed in this study (see Gabriel 2003), fully participates in the meaning of the indirect transitive constructions. The semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations also

provides evidence that the use of either the direct or indirect construction of a given verb is not arbitrary and that there is a systematic meaning difference between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of the verbs under scrutiny in this study, even though it may be very subtle for some verbs.

To account in more detail for the semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in argument alternations, further investigation is required. For instance, the alternations with dative indirect objects (e.g., *manquer/manquer à* ‘to miss’, *servir/servir à* ‘to serve/to be useful’) could constitute another topic of research, but requires a better understanding of the semantics of datives in French beforehand. One of the major limits of this study is also that it concerns only a part of the verbs displaying argument alternations. A systematic examination of all these verbs is necessary to evaluate the potential semantic import of *à* ‘at/to’ in all the cases of argument alternations. I assume, however, that the senses of *à* ‘at/to’ characterized in this study can be extended to other cases of argument alternations, notably those of *goûter* ‘to taste’, *atteindre* ‘to reach’ and *postuler* ‘to apply for’.

One of the semantic contributions of the preposition *à* ‘at/to’ observed in the indirect transitive constructions of *toucher* ‘to touch’ appears to be also found in the indirect transitive constructions of the verb *goûter* ‘to taste’. Similarly to *toucher* ‘to touch’ (see Chapter 6), the lexical semantics of the verb *goûter* ‘to taste’ entails the notion of contact and displays an argument alternation, as shown in (1):

- (1) a. *Il a goûté la drogue.*
 he has tasted the drug
 ‘He tasted the drug.’
- b. *Il a goûté à la drogue.*
 he has tasted at/to the drug
 ‘He tasted the drug/tried drugs.’

In both the direct (1a) and indirect (1b) transitive constructions, the verb *goûter* can be interpreted as ‘to taste’. In the indirect construction, however, the indirect object can have two interpretations: it can either refer to a concrete referent (i.e., ‘the drug’) or to the activity associated with the referent of the indirect objects (i.e., ‘drugs’ as in ‘taking drugs’). The latter interpretation is reminiscent of some of the usages of the indirect transitive construction of *toucher* ‘to touch’ (see section 6.3.2.2), namely, the kinetic usages of the verb that entail an abstract contact. In (1b), *à* ‘at/to’ may assign an abstract dimension to the object, which may lead to the interpretation of the object as the activity associated with the object (i.e., ‘taking drugs’). This brief analysis shows that some of the meanings of *à* ‘at/to’ postulated for the verbs under scrutiny in this study can indeed be extended to other verbs displaying argument alternations.

Another example of a verb entailing the notion of contact and displaying argument alternations, illustrated in (2), is *atteindre* ‘to reach’:

- (2) a. *Il a atteint le sommet.*
 he has reached the top
 ‘He reached the top.’
- b. *Il a atteint au sommet.*
 he has reached at/to the top
 ‘He reached the top.’

In the French grammar *Le Bon Usage* (electronic version), the authors observe that the indirect transitive construction of the verb (2b) is usually used when the event entails difficulties to overcome or efforts to make (§284). This semantic property of the indirect transitive construction could potentially be related to the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal. The lexical semantics of the verb *atteindre* ‘to reach’ entails a contact between its subject (the Trajector) and its object (the Landmark) and the notion of goal. In the profiling of the event denoted by *atteindre* ‘to reach’, the Landmark can be characterized as a target, that is, the endpoint of the goal entailed by the lexical semantics of the verb. As the verb *atteindre* ‘to reach’ mainly profiles the contact between the subject and a target, the abstract path entailed by the notion of goal is implicit, in a similar fashion to what has been observed with the verb *viser* ‘to aim’ (see section 4.7). It could be argued that the use of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal in the indirect transitive construction profiles the implicit path entailed by the lexical semantics of the verb and that the profiling of the path in the indirect transitive construction of the verb emphasizes the efforts the subject has to make to reach his target. This tentative analysis undoubtedly needs further investigation but shows that the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of an abstract goal could be relevant to the analysis of the meaning differences observed between the direct and indirect transitive constructions of *atteindre* ‘to reach’.

A last example illustrating how the semantic analyses of *à* ‘at/to’ proposed in this study can be extended to other cases of argument alternations involves the verb *postuler* ‘to apply for’. The verb *postuler* ‘to apply for’ differs from the other cases of argument

alternations analyzed in this study as it can also be followed by the preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’, as shown in (3):

- (3) a. *Il a postulé un poste de professeur.*
 he has applied a position of professor
 ‘He applied for a professor position.’
- b. *Il a postulé à un poste de professeur.*
 he has applied at/to a position of professor
 ‘He applied for a professor position.’
- c. *Il a postulé pour un poste de professeur.*
 he has applied for/to a position of professor
 ‘He applied for a professor position.’

The verb *postuler* ‘to apply for’ can appear in a direct transitive (3a), an indirect transitive (3b) or an intransitive construction followed by an adverbial introduced by the preposition *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ (3c). The prepositional phrase *pour un poste de professeur* ‘for a professor position’ can indeed be characterized as an adverbial, as shown by the *en faire en autant* ‘to do the same’ test (Tellier 1995; see section 3.1.2):

- (4) a. *Il a postulé pour un poste de professeur et en a fait autant pour un poste d’assistant.*
 he has applied for/to a position of professor and of.it has done as much for/to a position of assistant
 ‘He applied for a professor position and did the same for an assistant position.’
- b. **Il a postulé à un poste de professeur et en a fait autant à un poste d’assistant.*
 he has applied at/to a position of professor and of.it has done as much at/to a position of assistant
 ‘He applied for a professor position and did the same for an assistant position.’

The fact that the prepositional phrases in (4a) pass the *en faire autant* ‘to do the same’ test and not those in (4b) shows that the prepositional phrases in (4a) can be viewed as adverbials and those in (4b) as arguments of the verb.

The lexical semantics of the verb *postuler* ‘to apply for’ can be roughly glossed as ‘to make a request’. While the direct transitive construction illustrated in (3a) can be read as “he requested the position”, the indirect transitive construction with *à* ‘at/to’ in (3b) and the intransitive construction with *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ in (3c) can be interpreted as “he made a request for the position”. I assume that, in the indirect transitive construction, *à* ‘at/to’ expresses an abstract goal and that the abstract meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ as the expression of goal is in competition with the more specific notion of goal expressed by *pour* ‘for/(in order) to’ (see section 3.2.2).

This assumption appears to be supported by the recent evolution of the three types of constructions in terms of frequency of usage. A quick look at data collected from *Google Books* shows that the direct transitive construction was predominantly used until the 1990s. I counted the occurrences of *postuler/postule/postulé un/le poste // un/l’emploi*, *postuler/postule/postulé à un/au poste // à un/à l’emploi* and *postuler/postule/postulé pour un/le poste // pour un/ l’emploi* (‘to apply/applies/applied for the/a position // the/a job’) per decade, since the 1950s. The estimates of the number of occurrences for each type of constructions are summarized in Table 7.1.

	DIRECT TRANSITIVE	INDIRECT TRANSITIVE (à ‘at/to’)	INTRANSITIVE (pour ‘for/(in order) to’)
1950s	96.33% (420)	1.85% (8)	1.85% (8)
1960s	96.18% (478)	2.01% (10)	1.81% (9)
1970s	91.19% (735)	6.95% (56)	1.86% (15)
1980s	67.64% (579)	26.87% (230)	5.49% (47)
1990s	47.77% (647)	31.35% (453)	23.88% (345)
2000s	15.19% (591)	40.76% (1586)	44.05% (1714)

Table 7.1: Evolution of the types of constructions with *postuler* ‘to apply for’

Although the results in Table 7.1 are not entirely reliable as they are only estimates based on the number of occurrences found in *Google Books*, they still show a recent evolution of the uses of the three types of constructions with *postuler* ‘to apply for’. The direct transitive construction was predominantly used until the 1990s and the indirect transitive and intransitive constructions were marginal from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the 1980s, there was a significant rise in the frequency of the occurrences of the indirect transitive constructions, followed by a similar rise for the intransitive construction in the 1990s. In the 2000s, the intransitive construction appears to be the most predominant type of construction, slightly above the indirect transitive construction.

The analysis of the meaning of *à* ‘at/to’ in the indirect transitive construction of *postuler* ‘to apply for’ undoubtedly needs further investigation. It could, however, be argued that the verb has been through a progressive loss of transitivity. It is only after the indirect transitive construction became more frequent that we witness a rise in the frequency of the intransitive construction.

I assume that a change in the conceptualization of the event denoted by *postuler* ‘to apply for’ has led to a progressive loss of the affectedness of the object entailed in this event. In other words, while with the direct transitive construction, the position applied for can be interpreted as directly “requested”, with the indirect transitive and intransitive constructions, it is viewed as the goal of the process of “making a request”. This loss of affectedness correlates with a change of the construction of the verb, and consequently with the level of energy involved. While the direct transitive construction entails a transfer of energy from the subject to the object, the indirect transitive construction signals a disruption in the transfer of energy and the intransitive construction does not entail any transfer.

As the recent evolution of the verbal construction is an epiphenomenon that only concerns the verb *postuler* ‘to apply for’, it seems hard to account for this linguistic change with any other motivation than a change in the conceptualization of the event. The different verbal constructions reflect different conceptualizations of the event. In other words, the syntax of the verbal constructions is meaningful.

References

- Abeillé, Anne, Olivier Bonami, Danièle Godard & Jesse Tseng. 2006. The syntax of French *à* and *de*: an HPSG analysis. In P. Saint Dizier (ed.), *Linguistic Dimensions of Prepositions*, pages 147–162. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Achard, Michel. 1998. *Representations of Cognitive Structures: Syntax and Semantics of French Sentential Complements*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Adamczewski, Henri. 1991. *Le Français déchiffré : Clé du langage et des langues*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language (ARTFL)*: <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/>
- Anderson, John. 1971. *The Grammar of Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, John. 1977. *On Case Grammar*. London: Croom Helm.
- Apresjan, Jurij. 1974. Regular polysemy. *Linguistics* 142: 5–32.
- Barcelona, Antonio. 2003. *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot, Hava & Suzanne Kemmer. 1995. La grammaticalisation des prépositions : concurrence et compétition. *Revue romane*, 30 (2): 205–226.
- Beavers, John. 2006. *Argument/Oblique Alternations and the Structure of Lexical Meaning*. PhD thesis, Stanford University.
- Beavers, John. 2009. Predicting argument realization from oblique marker semantics. In R. P. Leow, H. Campos & D. Lardiere (eds.), *Little Words: Their History, Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics, and Acquisition*, pages 121–130. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- Beavers, John. 2010. The structure of lexical meaning: Why semantics really matters. *Language* 86: 821–864.
- Beavers, John. 2011. On affectedness. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 29 (2): 335–370.
- Bennett, David. C. 1975. *Spatial and Temporal Uses of English Prepositions*. London: Longman.

- Blanche-Benveniste, Claire, Jean Stéfani, José Deulofeu & Karel Van den Eynde. 1984. *Pronoms et syntaxe. L'approche pronominale et son application au français*. Paris: Peeters.
- Blinkenberg, Andreas. 1960. *Le Problème de la transitivité en français moderne : essai syntactico-sémantique*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.
- de Boer, Cornelis. 1926. *Essai sur la syntaxe moderne de la préposition en français et en italien*. Paris: Champion.
- Borillo, Andrée. 2001. Il y a prépositions et prépositions. *Travaux de linguistique* 42–43: 141–156.
- Bréal, Michel. 1897. *Essai de sémantique : science des significations*. Paris: Hachette.
- Brisard, Frank, Gert Van Rillaer & Dominiek Sandra. 2001. Processing polysemous, homonymous and vague adjectives. In H. Cuyckens & B. Zawada (eds.), *Polysemy in Cognitive Linguistics*, pages 261–285. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brunot, Ferdinand & Charles Bruneau. 1956. *Histoire de la langue française*. Paris: Champion.
- Bybee, Joan, Revere Perkins & William Pagliuca. 1994. *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect and Modality in the Languages of the World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cadiot, Pierre. 1997. *Les Prépositions abstraites*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Campbell, Lyle. 2001. *Grammaticalization: A Critical Assessment*. Special issue, *Language Sciences* 23: 93–112.
- Cervoni, Jean. 1991. *La Préposition. Étude sémantique et pragmatique*. Paris: Duculot.
- Chomsky, Noam 1957. *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1968. *Language and Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Colin, Jean-Paul. 1971. *Nouveau dictionnaire des difficultés du français*. Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert.

- Cooper, Gloria S. 1968. *A Semantic Analysis of English Locative Prepositions*. Bolt, Beranek and Newman Report No. 1587.
- Croft, William. 1991. *Syntactic Categories and Grammatical Relations: The Cognitive Organization of Information*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Croft, William. 1998. Event structure in argument linking. In M. Butt & W. Geuder (eds.), *The Projection of Arguments: Lexical and Syntactic Constraints*, pages 1–43. Stanford: CSLI publications.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Croft, William. 2012. *Aspects and Causal Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cruse, D. A. 1973. Some thoughts on agentivity. *Journal of Linguistics* 9: 11–23.
- Cruse, Alan. 1995. Polysemy and related phenomena from a Cognitive Linguistic viewpoint. In P. Saint Dizier & E. Viegas (eds.), *Computational Lexical Semantics*, pages 33–49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cuyckens, Hubert. 2002. Metonymy in prepositions. In H. Cuyckens & G. Radden (eds.), *Perspectives on Prepositions*, pages 257–266. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Davis, Anthony. 2001. *Linking by Types in the Hierarchical Lexicon*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- DeLancey, Scott. 1987. Transitivity in grammar and cognition. In R. S. Tomlin (ed.), *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*, pages 53–68. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Desclés, Jean-Pierre. 1998. Transitivity sémantique, transitivity syntaxique. In A. Rousseau (ed.), *La Transitivity*, pages 161–180. Villeneuve d'Asq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion.
- Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (8^e édition):
<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/academie8/>
- Dixon, Robert M. W. 1994. *Ergativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dowty, David R. 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67: 547–619.

- Dubois, Jean & Françoise Dubois-Charlier. 1997. *Les Verbes français*. Paris: Larousse.
- Dupré, Paul. 1971. *Encyclopédie du bon français dans l'usage contemporain*. Paris: Éditions de Trévise.
- Fagard, Benjamin. 2006. *Évolution sémantique des prépositions dans les langues romanes*. PhD thesis, Université Paris 7 & Università Roma 3.
- Fauconnier, Gilles. 1997. *Mappings in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fillmore, Charles. J. 1968. The case for case. In E. Bach & R. T. Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory*, pages 1–88. London: Holt, Rinehart and Company.
- Fillmore, Charles. J. 1982. Towards a descriptive framework for spatial deixis. In R. Jarvella, & Wolfgang Klein (eds.), *Speech, Place and Action*, pages 31–49. New York: Wiley.
- Fries, Norbert. 1991. Prepositions and prepositional phrases: A contrastive analysis. In G. Rauh (ed.), *Approaches to Prepositions*, pages 53–75. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Gabriel, Christoph. 2003. Relational elements in French. A minimalist approach to grammaticalization. *Linguistische Berichte* 193: 3–22.
- Gawron, Jean Mark. 1986. Situations and prepositions. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 9: 327–382.
- Geeraerts, Dirk. 1993. Vagueness's puzzles, polysemy's vagaries. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4: 223–272.
- Girodet, Jean. 1981. *Dictionnaire Bordas des pièges et difficultés du français*. Paris: Bordas.
- Givón, Talmy. 1985. Ergative morphology and transitivity gradients in Newari. In F. Plank (ed.), *Relational Typology*, pages 89–107. Berlin: Mouton.
- Goldberg, Adele E. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Google Books: <http://books.google.com/>

- Gougenheim, Georges. 1959. Y a-t-il des prépositions vides en français? *Le Français moderne* 27: 1–25.
- Goyens, Michèle, Béatrice Lamiroy & Ludo Melis. 2002. Déplacement et repositionnement de la préposition *à* en français. *Linguisticae Investigationes* 25(2): 275–310.
- Grandgent, Charles. 1962. *An Introduction to Vulgar Latin*. New York: Hafner.
- Grevisse, Maurice & André Goosse. *Le Bon Usage* (electronic version): <http://www.lebonusage.com/login>
- Gross, Maurice. 1968. *Grammaire transformationnelle du français vol. I. Syntaxe du verbe*. Paris: Larousse
- Gross, Maurice. 1969. *Grammaire transformationnelle du français : lexique des constructions complétives*. Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 1993. Inchoative/causative verb alternations. In B. Comrie & M. Polinsky (eds.), *Causatives and Transitivity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Heine, Bernd. 1992. Grammaticalization chains. *Studies in Language* 16: 335–368.
- Heine, Bernd, Ulrike Claudi & Friedrike Hunnemeyer. 1991. *Grammaticalization: A Conceptual Framework*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Heine, Bernd & Tania Kuteva. 2002. *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herslund, Michael. 1988. *Le Datif en français*. Paris: Peeters-Louvain.
- Hestvik, Arild. 1991. Subjectless binding domains. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 9: 455–496.
- Hopper, Paul & Sandra Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language* 56 (2): 251–299.
- Hopper, Paul & Elizabeth Traugott. 2003. *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1983. *Semantics and Cognition*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

- Joseph, Brian D. 2002. Is there such a thing as ‘grammaticalization’? *Language Sciences* 23 (2–3): 163–186.
- Kemmer, Suzanne. 1993. *The Middle Voice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kemmer, Suzanne E. & Hava Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot. 1996. The semantics of “empty prepositions” in French. In E. H. Casad (ed.), *Cognitive Linguistics in the Redwoods*, pages 348–389. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kilroe, Patricia. 1987. *The Grammaticalization of the French preposition à*. PhD thesis, University of Texas at Austin.
- Kreitzer, Anatol. 1997. Multiple levels of schematization: a study of conceptualization of space. *Cognitive Linguistics* 8(4): 291–325.
- Kurylowicz, Jerzy. 1975. The evolution of grammatical categories. In J. Kurylowicz (ed.), *Esquisses linguistiques*, pages 38–54. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag. **75**
- Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George. 1993. The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, pages 202–250. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1987a. *Transitivity, Case and Grammatical Relations: A Cognitive Grammar Prospectus*. Duisburg: Universität Duisburg Gesamthochschule.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1987b. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol. I: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1990. *Concept, Image, and Symbol. The Cognitive Basis of Grammar*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1991. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol. II: Descriptive Application*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lasserre, Émilie. 1936. *Est-ce à ou de?* Lausanne: Payot & Cie.
- Lazard, Gilbert. 1998. *Actancy*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Lazard, Gilbert. 2003. Transitivity revisited as an example of a more strict approach in typological research. *Folia Linguistica* XXXVI (3–4): 141–190.
- Lecki, Andrzej. 2010. *Grammaticalization Paths of Have in English*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Leech, Geoffrey. N. 1969. *Towards a Semantic Description of English*. London: Longman.
- Lehmann, Christian. 1985. Grammaticalization: synchronic variation and diachronic change. *Lingua e Stile* 20: 303–318.
- Lehmann, Christian. 1995. *Thoughts on Grammaticalization*. Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Levin, Beth. 1993. *Towards a Lexical Organization of English Verbs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Levin, Beth & Malka Rappaport Hovav. 2005. *Argument Realization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindsay, Wallace M. 1894. *The Latin Language: An Historical Account of Latin Sounds and Flexions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Littlefield, Heather A. 2006. *Syntax and Acquisition in the Prepositional Domain: Evidence from English for Fine-Grained Syntactic Categories*. PhD thesis, Boston University.
- Lüdi, Georges. 1981. Sémantique, syntaxe et forme casuelle. A propos de «aider à qn.» en français romand. *Vox Romanica* 40: 86–97.
- Luraghi, Sylvia. 2003. *On the Meaning of Prepositions and Cases*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lyons, John. 1977. *Semantics, vol. II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marque-Pucheu, Christiane. 2008. La couleur des prépositions à et de. *Langue française* 157: 74–103.
- Meillet, Antoine. 1912. L'évolution des formes grammaticales. In A. Meillet (ed.), *Linguistique générale et linguistique historique*, pages 130–148. Paris: Champion.
- Melis, Ludo. 2001. *La Préposition en français*. Paris: Orphys.

- Miller, Philip. 1992. *Clitics and Constituents in Phrase Structure Grammar*. London: Garland.
- Moignet, Gérard. 1981. *Systématique de la langue française*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- de Mulder, Walter. 2001. La linguistique diachronique, les études sur la grammaticalisation et la sémantique du prototype. *Langue française* 130: 8–32.
- Næss, Åshild. 2008. *Prototypical Transitivity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Picoche, Jacqueline. 1986. *Structure sémantique du lexique français*. Paris: Nathan.
- Pollard, Carl & Ivan A. Sag. 1994. *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pottier, Bernard. 1962. *Systématique des éléments de relation*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Rauh, Gisa. 1993. On the grammar of lexical and non-lexical prepositions in English. In C. Zelinsky-Wibbelt (ed.), *The Semantics of Prepositions: From Mental Processing to Natural Language Processing*, pages 99–150. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ravin, Yael & Claudia Leacock. 2000. *Polysemy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rice, Sally. 1987. *Toward a Cognitive Model of Transitivity*. PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego.
- Rooryck, Johan. 1996. Prepositions and minimalist case marking. In H. Thrainsson, S. D. Epstein & S. Peter (eds.), *Studies in Comparative Germanic Syntax vol. II*, pages 226–256. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Rosh, Eleanor. 1977. Human categorization. In N. Warren (ed.), *Advances in Cross-Cultural Psychology vol. VII*, pages 1–72. London: Academic Press.
- Rousseau, André. 1998. *La Transitivité*. Villeneuve d'Asq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion.
- Ruhl, Charles. 1989. *On Monosemy: A Study in Linguistics Semantics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ruwet, Nicolas. 1982. À propos des prépositions de lieu en français. In N. Ruwet (ed.), *Grammaire des insultes et autres études*, pages 317–340. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

- Sandra, Dominiek. 1998. What linguists can and can't tell us about the mind: a reply to Croft. *Cognitive Linguistics* 9 (4): 361–378.
- Schlesinger, Izchak M. 1995. *Cognitive Space and Linguistic Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Séchehaye, Charles A. 1926. *Essai sur la logique interne de la phrase*. Paris: Champion.
- Spang-Hanssen, Ebbe. 1963. *Les Prépositions incolores du français moderne*. Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag.
- Sweetser, Eve E. 1988. Grammaticalization and semantic bleaching. In S. Axmaker, A. Jaisser & H. Singmaster (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, pages 389–405. Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2000. *Toward a Cognitive Semantics vol. I & II*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Taylor, John R. 1995. *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tellier, Christiane. 1995. *Éléments de syntaxe du français*. Montréal: Gaëtan Morin.
- Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé (TLFi)*: <http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>
- Troberg, Michelle. 2008. *Dynamic Two-place Indirect Verbs in French: A Synchronic and Diachronic Study in Variation and Change of Valence*. PhD thesis, University of Toronto.
- Tseng, Jesse L. 2000. *The Representation and Selection of Prepositions*. PhD thesis, Institute for Communicating and Collaborative Systems/Division of Informatics, Edinburgh.
- Tsunoda, Tasaku. 1985. Remarks on transitivity. *Journal of Linguistics* 19: 389–438.
- Tuggy, David. 1993. Ambiguity, polysemy, and vagueness. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4: 273–290.
- Tyler, Andrea & Vyvyan Evans. 2003. *The Semantics of English Prepositions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Van Valin, Robert D. & Randy J. LaPolla. 1997. *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Control*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1986. *L'Espace en français*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1987. La préposition *à* et le principe d'anticipation. *Langue française* 76: 77–111.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1988. Les usages spatiaux statiques de la préposition *à*. *Cahiers de lexicologie* 52 (3): 119–148.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1990. Representations, prototypes and centrality. In S. Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Meanings and Prototypes: Studies in Linguistic Categorization*, pages 403–437. London: Routledge.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1991. *Spatial Prepositions : A Case Study from French*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1993. La préposition *à* pâlit-elle derrière *toucher*? *Langages* 110: 107–127.
- Vandeloise, Claude. 1996. Touching: a minimal transmission of energy. In E. H. Casad (ed.), *Cognitive Linguistics in the Redwoods*, pages 541–568. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Vendryes, Joseph. 1921. *Le Langage. Introduction linguistique à l'histoire*. Paris: Renaissance du Livre.
- Vincent, Nigel. 1999. The evolution of C-structure: prepositions and PPs from Indo-European to Romance. *Linguistics: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Language Sciences* 37 (6): 1111–1153.
- von Wartburg, Walther & Paul Zumthor. 1958. *Précis du français contemporain*. Tübingen: Francke.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan.
- Zribi-Hertz, Anne. 1984. *Orphan Prepositions in French and the Concept of 'Null Pronoun'*. Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

